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Participant Experience in a Gerontology Certificate Program

BY

Carla H. M. Drader ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

IN

Adult and Higher Education

Department of Adult Career and Technology

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring 1994

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Dr. Paula Brook

Dr. Wayne Lamble

S. O'Brien Cousins
Dr. Sandra O'Brien-Cousins

Sue M. Scott
Dr. Sue Scott

December 17, 1993

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my husband Keith in recognition of all his love and support.

Abstract

This study was drawn out of a larger program evaluation study regarding the Certificate Program in Gerontology at the Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta. This Program has been in operation since the fall of 1989, and was designed to enhance the continuing professional development of individuals working in the field of gerontology. The objectives of the larger program evaluation were to gather information for facilitating effective decision making, to foster teamwork and communication among program stakeholders, and to facilitate the focusing of the goals, objectives, and operations of the program.

The major purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of program participants. This study was guided by four research questions. The first question sought information on students' expectations of the program. The second question explored how participation in the Certificate Program contributed to their professional development. The third question focused on the students' reactions to the program, and the fourth question explored the students' suggestions for changes to the program.

The data were gathered by the use of two focus group interviews, one with current students, and one with graduates. Both interviews took place in a classroom at the Faculty of Extension on a Wednesday evening in April, 1993. The interviews lasted for one and a half hours each, and were conducted by the researcher. These interviews were tape recorded with the written permission of the participants. The researcher was assisted by a Professor from the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta.

All the graduates living in the Edmonton area (11) were invited to attend the focus group; 7 participated. There were 14 active students who by completing a form that had been given to them indicated an interest in participating in an interview. Of those, 8 agreed over the phone to participate, and 5 actually attended.

The computer program Sonar Professional was used to assist in the analysis of the data. Findings were reported as descriptive data using the interview questions as a guide. Then patterns and themes within the data were reported.

The students motivation for pursing this Program were a complex set of influences most frequently related to work and personal issues. Generally the Program did meet the students expectations. The interdisciplinary nature of the program, and interaction with other professionals were the most liked aspect of the program. The program clearly contributed to the development of these professionals, with the students giving many examples of changes in their knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

The most disliked aspect of the program was its lack of recognition. The students felt that there was little recognition by their supervisors, peers, or coworkers of the work that they had done. They also felt that the core courses were comparable to other University courses and so should receive transfer credit.

Acknowledgments

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge all of the professors in the department of Adult, Career, and Technology Education that it was my privilege to work with.

Dr. Paula Brook for being an outstanding advisor, and advocate.

Dr. Dave Collett for his insight and wisdom.

Dr. Art Deane for always sharing information, taking the time to answer any question and showing an interest in my work.

Dr. Sue Scott for encouraging me to grow and do the best possible work.

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Chapter I

Overview of the Problem

Introduction

Gerontology is the study of aging and its effect on society and individuals. Practitioners in this field are found in a wide range of occupations, communities, and institutions. As the population ages this range of occupations will broaden, and the numbers of professionals involved in this field will increase. According to the Alberta Provincial Government the number of older persons in the Province (over 65 years of age) is increasing more rapidly than the rest of the population; the total population will grow by 36 percent within the next twenty years, but the population aged 65 and over will do so by 61 percent (Alberta Bureau of Statistics, 1984).

With such dramatic increases in the numbers of seniors, it is clear that more employees involved in programs and services for seniors will be needed. This will include service providers, administrators, policy makers and planners, designers, programmers, educators, researchers as well as workers in other non-traditional areas such as business and industry. To effectively meet the needs of their client group these individuals will need continuing professional education (Proposal, 1989).

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of students in and graduates from a Certificate Program in Gerontology. This includes students' expectations of the program, development as a result of the program, and reactions to the program. These findings are discussed in the context of the current literature of continuing professional education (CPE).

There is great potential for this research to contribute to the CPE literature regarding individuals who pursue continuing education in the field of gerontology. Little is known about professionals who continue their education in this field, but as the population ages and more professionals enter this field, research in this area of CPE should increase. This research also holds the potential to confirm the findings regarding motivation for participating in CPE, and contribute to what is known about fostering participation in CPE. My personal interest in CPE and program evaluation lead to my undertaking of this thesis.

This chapter outlines the program history of the Certificate in Gerontology, the background of the study, the problem statement and research questions, the limitations and delimitations, the definition of terms and the organization of the thesis.

Program History

A Certificate Program in Gerontology was approved by the University of Alberta, Faculty of Extension Council in January 1989. The underlying drive for this proposal was the need in Alberta for individuals who are "knowledgeable service providers, administrators, policy makers and planners, designers, programmers, educators and researchers" (Proposal, 1989, p. 1). This need for people educated in the field of gerontology was seen as increasing in importance as Alberta's population ages. The Certificate program was designed to meet this need.

The participant audience of this program was intended to be distinct from gerontology programs at Mount Royal College in Calgary and Grant MacEwan Community College in that their programs "are geared to a lower level of service providers and both emphasize a model not appropriate for non-nursing personnel" (Proposal, 1989, p. 6).

When the program was proposed, the University of Alberta already had several courses in the area of gerontology, but they were dispersed throughout several departments. It was thought that a certificate program would offer advantages over this ad hoc system. The new program "allows for the development of a coherent set of courses with clear conceptual underpinnings that enables professionals to provide better quality service to their clients. Further, students are generally interested in receiving a certificate, attesting to their training in gerontology that is provided upon completion" (Proposal, 1989, p. 2). The courses in this certificate program were designed with a professional development focus.

The Gerontology Program is comprised of six core courses (215 hours total) and 46 hours of electives. Students who do not have adequate practical experience are required to complete a practicum of 39 additional hours. The six core courses are: Introduction to Gerontology, Biological/Physiological Aspects of Aging, Family Relationships in Aging, Psychology of Aging, Aging and Society, and an Integrated Seminar. The electives "are meant to complement the core courses, allow flexibility in the program, give specialized in-depth study opportunities to those who wish them, and to provide a forum for guest speakers and public issues" (Proposal, 1989, p. 12). In the past electives have included: Community Development: How to Stay out of the Way, Dementia: Institutional Care and Design, Drugs and the Elderly, Environmental Design for Long Term Care Facilities, Families of the Elderly, Health Promotion: Writing Plain and Simple, and Women and Canada's Aging Society.

When the program was initiated an Advisory Committee was set up to help develop and monitor the Program. It consisted of the Dean of Extension, the Director of the Science and Technology Unit, the Director of the University's Center for Gerontology, and appointed individuals from the University, government and practitioner employer groups. The function of this Committee was to regularly provide advice to the Director of Science and Technology Programs (now the Director of The Applied Sciences) in the areas of "program planning, promotion, and advertising, course content, instructor qualifications and course / program evaluations" (Proposal, 1989, Appendix J). In conjunction with the original Advisory Committee the following goals and objectives of the program were developed by the Director and his staff.

Program Goals and Objectives

A program goal statement includes broad statements of intent describing what is to be achieved within the total program (Hamilton, Norton, Fardig, Harrington & Quinn, 1986). The goals of this professional development program as identified in the original Proposal are as follows:

A. This Program should contribute toward a continual upgrading of the competence of practitioners in the field of gerontology by providing continuing education that emphasizes understanding of the elements involved in studying and working with the elderly adult.

B. This Certificate Program should produce a better understanding of the elderly adult population.

Program objectives include statements describing the means by which the goals of a professional development program will be accomplished, focusing on the responsibilities of the learner and the program (Hamilton et al., 1986).

Learning Objectives. The students will:

1. develop a broad critical overview of the important concepts, research and literature in the field of gerontology.

2. identify and describe the interdependent processes of social, psychological and biological aging.

3. gain an understanding of personal and societal attitudes toward aging and older people.

4. recognize and assess the unique needs, concerns and contributions of older adults in the socio-cultural, political and economic context of Canada.

5. gain an understanding of public policies relating to older adults and major issues concerning them.

The Program will:

1. expand, enrich and improve the knowledge of those planning and providing services to the older person.

2. provide interdisciplinary education in gerontology by building on undergraduate training from many disciplines.

3. provide an understanding of the integration of research, theory and practice.

4. establish a coherent, multi-disciplinary sequence of courses leading to a certificate.

Operational Objectives. The operation of the program was initiated by the following objectives:

1. To begin formal offering of the Program September 1, 1989.

2. To so administer the Program that most part-time students will be able to graduate in three years from time of commencement.

3. To operate the program on a cost-recovery basis.

4. To initiate a process of planning and development to ensure the Program is and will continue to be a leader in its field.

5. To widen the availability of the Program to include at least northern Alberta as soon as is reasonable.

6. To research other modes of delivery that might make it possible for this Program to have a Western Canadian audience at some time in the future.

7. To present follow up courses to graduates of the Program.

Well conceived and clearly communicated program goals and objectives are critical for the success of any program. But these goals and objectives need to be reassessed on a regular bases. This refocusing of the Program's goals and objectives was one of the major objectives of the program evaluation of the Gerontology program in the 1992 - 1993 academic year. A brief background of this program evaluation, as well as the thesis study which came out of it are outlined below.

Background of Study

The Certificate Program in Gerontology at the Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta, has been in operation since the fall of 1989. This continuing professional development program "is designed to expand, enrich and improve the knowledge of those planning and providing services to the older person; to provide interdisciplinary education in gerontology by building on undergraduate training from many disciplines; and to provide an understanding of research, theory, and practice" (University of Alberta, 1992, p. 11).

The focus of this research study, which was the experiences of students in the program, arose out of a larger program evaluation of The Certificate Program in Gerontology during the 1992 - 1993 academic year. This section describes the development of both studies.

The evaluation sub-committee of the Advisory Committee carried out a review of several courses in 1992 and in their report recommended that an comprehensive evaluation of the Certificate Program in Gerontology was needed. This was in partial fulfillment of the evaluation requirement outlined in the original program proposal which stated in section 9 that,

> Every three years the Advisory Committee will undertake a survey of: a.) Graduates, b.) Students, c.) Employers, d.) Instructors, e.) Other professional workers in the field. This survey will determine how the program is perceived and accepted, and what fine-tuning might be appropriate as a result. Results and recommendations will be presented to the Director of the Program for possible discussion with the Faculty and for appropriate action... A three-way evaluation process will be incorporated for each course, and the Advisory Committee will do an evaluative survey every 3 years.

Within this Program, success is determined in part by the number of active students. It appears that the number of individuals registering in the program is decreasing significantly, and that only a few individuals are completing the program. This study will provide data that may address, if only in part, reasons for declining interest in the program.

As a graduate assistant from the Department of Adult, Career and Technology Education I was employed to work on this project under the direction of Dr. Wayne Lamble, Director, Applied Sciences Program. It was determined by the program Director and staff responsible for the program that the evaluation was to be of a formative nature. The major objectives of the evaluation were determined in October 1992 were as follows:

1. to gather information for the purpose of facilitating effective decision-making with regards to the program;

2. to foster communication and team work among all the stakeholders of the program; and

3. to facilitate the focusing of the goals, objectives, and operations of the program.

To achieve these objectives, the Director, program staff, and evaluator selected seven Program components as the basis of data collection: the Advisory Committee, instructors, community stakeholders, inactive students, active students, program graduates, and program documents. It was thought that this range of data sources would provide the necessary depth and breadth to make the evaluation as valid and reliable as possible.

Although student experiences were acknowledged as an important aspect of the evaluation, the extent of data collection and analysis would be limited to the objectives of the evaluation study which were achieved through the use of a questionnaire. I saw the opportunity to further investigate the students' expectations, development and reactions as a thesis topic. With regard to the student experience I wanted to gather more in-depth data. A proposal for an expansion of the active student and graduate component of the evaluation was discussed with the Director.

Focus group interviews with the active students and graduates were selected as an appropriate means to explore student experiences. Because valuable information was gained from these, this additional information about the Program was also included in the larger program evaluation report.

To clarify how the thesis research fit into the larger study the following is a time line of the **Certificate Program Evaluation**:

Sept. 1992 Conceptualization and planning of the study

Oct. 1992	Document analysis and meeting with the Chair of the Advisory Committee
Nov. 1992	Strategic planning meeting of key individuals in the field
Jan. 1993	Stakeholders Program review meeting
Jan. - Mar. 1993	Administration of student evaluation questionnaires
Apr. 1993	Focus Group Interviews with students and graduates
May 1993	Draft of the Report is presented to Director
June 1993	Report is discussed with Advisory Committee
July 1993	Final Report is submitted

The research for this study was ongoing during the time of the larger program evaluation.

Instruments and Techniques of the Program Evaluation

The seven components of the program (the Advisory Committee, instructors, community stakeholders, inactive students, active students, program graduates, and program documents) that were chosen to study were approached through four distinct techniques.

First the document analysis included gathering information about the students, graduates, Advisory Committee, instructors, and the program's development and proposal. Second two meeting were held to gain information from the Advisory Committee, instructors, and community stakeholders.

Third, a student questionnaire was sent to all active and inactive student in the program, and fourth focus group interviews were conducted with a group of current students, and a group of graduates from the program. The student questionnaire is discussed in greater depth because it is directly related to the recruitment of current students for the focus group interviews.

Student Questionnaire

Students were seen as a crucial part of this evaluation. This was determined by the evaluator and the program's administration in September, 1992 when the evaluation was being conceptualized. Therefore all students past, present, and graduated were contacted to be involved in the evaluation. It was determined that it was particularly important to reach the inactive participants (these are individuals who are registered in the program but have not taken a core course or elective in two years).

At the beginning of January a survey instrument was developed by the evaluator and reviewed by the program director and staff. It was originally planned that the students who were not currently participating in the program would be surveyed by telephone. This processes proved to be too time consuming. Thus, after consideration by the evaluator and the program director, it was decided that the students would be surveyed using a questionnaire.

At the end of January, 1993 and through February and March, the active and inactive students were surveyed. The active students who were currently participating winter term courses were contacted during their class on Wednesday January 20, 1993. They were informed of the study and invited to complete a questionnaire. These individuals were allowed to take the questionnaire home and return it the following week. The students completed the surveys on their own time and returned them to their instructor who them placed them in the department's mail box. All of the questionnaires were returned with in three weeks of handing them out.

The other active students were mailed a questionnaire with a covering letter explaining the study, and a return stamped envelope. The survey can be found in Appendix A, while the covering letter is in Appendix B. No specific deadline was indicated for the return of the survey which was mailed February 10, 1993. To facilitate the sending of a reminder notice all the outgoing surveys were coded with a number which corresponded to a student's name. In order to assure confidentiality only the researcher had access to this list. On March 10, 1993 a reminder letter, and additional survey, and return envelop was mailed to all those who had not responded. The reminder letter is also contained in Appendix B.

All of the individuals surveyed were invited to participate in a focus group interview in which they would discuss their experiences in greater depth. This invitation was contained in the covering letter as well as an invitation on a separate sheet that was included with all questionnaires. Interested individuals were asked to complete a section with their name, address, and telephone number and return it in the same envelop as the questionnaire. The completed invitations were immediately removed from the completed questionnaires in order to maintain confidentiality. This invitation can be found in Appendix C.

A discussion of the focus group interviews and their methodology can be found in Chapter 3. The problem statement and research questions that guided this research are detailed below.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

This research explored the experiences of students currently enrolled in and recent graduates from a Certificate Program in Gerontology at The

University of Alberta. Focus group interviews were used to explore the following research questions:

1. What were your expectations of the program?
    A. What did you expect in terms of courses and outcomes?
    B. How did the program meet your expectations? How did it not?
2. How did this program contribute to your professional development in the following areas of gerontology:
    A. Your understanding?
    B. Your attitudes?
    C. Your skills?
    D. Your future goals/aspirations?
3. What were your reactions to the program?
    A. What did you like?
    B. What did you not like?
4. What suggestions do you have for changes to the program?

The significance of this research is that the students are the focus. It is suggested by many adult educators that student needs should drive program (Witkin, 1984). For program planning, delivery, and evaluation considering the learner's goals for participating is important. The participants goals are often different although not incompatible with the goals of the program or instructor. "You need to think about their goals and perspective when you plan the course. By achieving the learner's goals you might just achieve yours as well" (Draves, 1984, p. 24). Because students are the users of the program, knowledge of their experiences and expectations is critical to the success of any program.

This information will be used in future planning by Program personnel. "Program evaluation isn't an end in itself. It's worth doing only if it helps in making decisions about program continuation, priorities, modifications, and so on" (Bennett, 1975, p. 8).

This research is also significant in its potential contribution to the literature of continuing professional education (CPE). Very little is written about individuals who pursue continuing professional education in the field of gerontology, but as the population ages professionals studying in this area will increase in both numbers and importance. It is also possible that the information gained from the participants will confirm the findings that exist in the literature on motivation for participating in CPE. Finally, there is the potential for the information gained from this study to contribute to the information regarding fostering participation in CPE. As more is known regarding the goals and motivations of participants the more programs can be designed to more effectively meet the needs of the learners, and hopefully increase the participation in CPE.

Limitations and Delimitations

As with all research this study had limitations. It is important to recognize these limitations if the information is to be viewed objectively. Because of the importance of allowing time for group dialogue it may be necessary to ask fewer specific questions than you would for an individual interview given the same amount of time. This questioning process can be dominated by a few individuals so it is important to create a balance in response time; the effective facilitation of focus groups requires extensive group process skills. Thus, asking fewer questions and using interviewer skills are a challenge of this method of data collection. It is also necessary that the participants be able to express themselves verbally.

The group setting may lead to some limitations, such as: unexpected diversions, especially when the participants know each other or power struggles or conflicts among participants arise. It is also not possible to guarantee the confidentiality of the participants during data gathering. Those participating in the focus group interviews are volunteers.

The focus group process itself can contribute to the limitations because people often say things that they never intended to say, and focus group interviews can be more "intrusive and involve greater reactivity than surveys, tests, and other quantitative approaches" (Patton, 1990, p. 356).

Because the study is only exploring a small sample of the total student population over a short period of time, there is the possibility of a low participation rate among some students. Such as students who are facing unusual high levels of stress at work, home, or a number of assignments or exams in their courses. A number of other factors exist that could keep individuals from participating, including: work, family, and personal concerns.

It is also critical to identify the parameters of the study; this helps to determine the studies' boundaries. The delimitations of this research include gathering student information only within the context of the Certificate Program in Gerontology no other program or educational setting was studied. The purpose of the study was only to report information; it was not to make decisions on the future of the program or to monitor the program in the future.

This study was limited to the two categories of students: active and graduated. The data were collected in each student subgroup only once during a focus group interview and with only a small sample of each subgroup. Thus the findings may have limited generalizability. Interviews were not conducted with the inactive student group (those who registered in the program but have not taken a course in the last two years).

Given the limitations and delimitations of this research it can contribute in-depth information from the students' perspectives. This information, although narrower in scope than the larger program evaluation, could add important insights into the program decision-making process. The data gathered can contribute to knowledge of the students needs, interest and expectations. If this information is translated in to practice it could lead to a more effective program, meeting the needs of more learners.

Definition of Terms

To aid in the understanding of this research the definitions of important terms are provided.

Within this study *certificate program participants* were defined by the following characteristics: at least 21 years of age, and have a University Baccalaureate degree, an appropriate 2-year Diploma from a recognized post-secondary institution, or an RN designation. Participants must also have some experience in the field of gerontology. Individuals not meeting all these admission requirements may be admitted on approval of the Program Director. Thus participants are those who have applied and been admitted to the Certificate Program in Gerontology.

For this study these participants were classified as:

Active students were those who had taken at least one course in the Gerontology Certificate Program in the past two years (1991 or 1992).

Graduates were those who had completed the program.

Inactive students were those who had not taken a course in the past two years but had been admitted in the certificate program.

The term *Continuing Professional Education* came into general usage in the late 1960s. Its meaning has evolved to include "all efforts to provide learning for active professionals" (Houle, 1981, p. 7).

Evaluation "is the formal determination of the effectiveness, value, or quality of a program product, process, objective or curriculum" (Worthen & Sanders,1987, p. 22). There are two types:

1. A *formative evaluation* asks evaluative questions that gain information in order to improve a program that already exists (Worthen & Sanders,1987).

2. A summative evaluation asks evaluative questions in order to determine if what is being studied (a curriculum or a program) should be continued (Worthen & Sanders,1987).

Expectations are defined as the expected good that students perceived receiving from participating in the program (Collins Gem English Dictionary).

Focus groups are a type of data gathering interview typically made up of seven to ten participants who have certain qualities in common that relate to the topic or the issue of the interview (Krueger, 1988).

Gerontology is defined as the study of aging and its effect on society and the individual (University of Alberta, 1992).

Professional development is an attempt to expand one's professional competence including, knowledge, attitudes and skills. This learning occurs after pre-service education and the entering into a profession or occupation (Langenbach, 1988).

Organization of Thesis

Chapter I introduced the study its context, problem statement, research questions, and significance of the study. I also outlined the limitations, delimitations, assumption, and definitions associated with the research.

Chapter II covers the related literature. It is divided into three key areas: program evaluation, participation in continuing education, and continuing professional education. The literature on program evaluation includes a comprehensive analysis of alternative approaches to program evaluation. The literature on participation gives an historical overview of participation in continuing education as well as current information. The literature on continuing professional education discusses the factors that influence the extent to which professionals participate in educational activities.

The research methodology is presented in Chapter III. This includes the study context, instrumentation, pilot testing and revision, recruitment, and ethical considerations as well as data collection procedures, and data analysis.

In Chapter IV the findings and analysis of the study are presented and in the final chapter findings are summarized, implications discussed and recommendations offered.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

This review highlights key literature in three areas: program evaluation, continuing education, and continuing professional education as they relate to this research. Because each of these topics is a field unto itself this review is only scratching the surface of each. It begins by establishing the nature of program evaluation, and the types of approach that may be taken. Participation in continuing education is described with particular attention to the motivation of participants. The final section introduces literature in the area of participation in continuing professional education. Modes of participation, the motivation for participation, deterrents to participation, and other factors that influence participation are discussed.

Program Evaluation

Evaluation is one of the key means of providing information to help educators improve their programs and practices. To clarify the evaluation process it is important to differentiate between the goal and role of evaluation. The goal of evaluation is to provide answers to significant assessment questions. These questions involve assigning value and making judgments. The role of evaluation refers to the ways in which the information will be used. This could include decision making, policy formation, assessment of student achievement, curriculum appraisal, program accreditation, or materials and programs improvement.

Evaluation can serve either a formative purpose (such as this study which is helping to improve an existing program) or a summative purpose (such as deciding whether a curriculum should be continued) (Worthen & Sander, 1987). In a formative evaluation the foremost questions of sponsors and audiences are: how can the program be improved, or how can it become more efficient or effective? Questions which may be asked by the evaluator include: what are the program's goals and objectives, and how will the program activities lead to attainment of the objectives? What adjustments in the program might lead to better attainment of the objectives? What problems are there and how can they be solved?

Questions considered by sponsors and audiences of a summative evaluation deal more with the fate of the program, for example: is this program worth continuing or expanding? How effective is it? What conclusions can be made about the effects of this program or its various components? The kinds of questions the evaluator might pose are: What programs are available as an alternative to this one, and how effective is this program in comparison to the alternative programs? Is this program differentially effective with particular types of participants and/or in particular locations? How costly is the program?

Although evaluation holds much promise for the field of education it is not a panacea and it cannot solve all of education's problems.

> Though evaluation can be enormously useful, it is generally counter productive for evaluators or those who depend on their work to propose evaluation as the ultimate solution to every problem or, indeed, as any sort of solution, because evaluation in and of itself won't effect a solution - though it might suggest one (Worthen & Sanders, 1987, p.9).

Evaluation is used to pinpoint program strengths and weaknesses, to recognize its good aspects, and to reveal its faults. But the purpose of evaluation is not to correct problems, that is the independent step of using the evaluation findings.

There is no one generally agreed upon definition of evaluation. This is reflected in the many different types of evaluation that are outlined next in this chapter. When analyzing the different types of evaluation it is important to consider the goal, role and the intended audience of each approach to evaluation (Worthen & Sanders, 1987).

The Major Approaches to Program Evaluation

There are many different ways to approach program evaluation, but generally these approaches can be categorized into a few basic types or "models." "The models themselves are idealizations of evaluation approaches. An actual evaluation is shaped by many different contingencies; thus it may take many shapes even when it begins conceptually as a particular type" (House, 1980, p.21). In other words, a model is an ideal type, and the real world is rarely ideal.

The systems analysis approach. This is a functionalist approach in which the data are quantitative. The evaluator tries to define a few output measures that attempt to explain the differences in program or policy indicators. The main audiences for this type of evaluation are managers and economists, and the main purpose is to increase efficiency. Using this approach one assumes consensus on the goals of the evaluation, a known cause and effect, and variables which can be measured. Objectivity is critical to a successful evaluation, and ideally the results of the evaluation would remain unchanged if conducted by a different evaluator. "A comprehensive evaluation answers questions about program planning, program monitoring, impact assessment, and economic efficiency" (House, 1980, p. 25).

This approach is most appropriate when the outcome of the evaluation can be easily reduced to a few possibilities, and the relationships are simple cause-and-effect. According to House, this approach excludes the input of participants in the program, and is often deficient both morally and politically. He feels that the approach is generally applied far beyond appropriate circumstances, and "at its worst, the systems analysis approach leads to scientism--the view that the only way to the truth is thorough certain methodologies. Objectivity is equated with reliability, with producing information from only certain types of instruments" (House, 1980, p. 226). One way to improve this approach is to increase the type and number of indicators used, and to combine it with other approaches.

The behavioral objectives approach. When using this approach an evaluator gathers information regarding whether the explicit goals of a program have been achieved. The discrepancy between stated goals and the measure of what exists is the determinant of the program's success. "The goals serve as the exclusive source of standards and criteria" (House, 1980, p. 26). This goal - based approach was espoused by Tyler in the 1950s, and remains in use today, especially in competency based education (Tyler, 1942).

To apply this type of evaluation effectively, the goals of the program must be clearly defined and communicated. This definition of goals leads to several important questions, such as: 'Who really defines the goals?' 'Are the goals a complete set of outcomes?' 'How can these goals be reduced and accurately measured?' and 'Are important outcomes of the program neglected because they do not fit into the designated goals?' (House, 1980).

On the positive side, the methodology of this approach is well defined. "... no other approach to evaluation has such an elaborate technology" (House, 1980, p. 229). Thus the procedures, tests, and instruments of this approach have been thoroughly developed and tested, so this approach has a great deal of face validity.

The goal-free approach. The goal-free approach is a direct reaction to the behavioral objectives approach. The proponents of this method argue that the evaluator should not bias his/her evaluation by using the program's goals as a guide. Thus, the evaluator must search for all outcomes of the program. "Many of these outcomes are unintended side effects, which may be positive or negative" (House, 1980, p. 30). This approach sees the participants or consumers as the audience of the evaluation. This is in contrast to other evaluations which view the program's managers as the audience.

One of the problems with this approach to evaluation is the lack of a highly defined methodology. It is also possible that the evaluator substitutes his/her own goals and objectives for those of the program and its developers (Glass, 1969; Scriven, 1978, Stake, 1967).

The decision-making approach. The decision-making approach recommends that the evaluation should be structured around the decisions that need to be made. These decisions are usually made by the administrator or top manager. Stufflebeam has been the main proponent of this approach, having defined: the three decision settings, the four types of decisions, the three steps in the evaluation and the four types of evaluation.

Regardless of the type of evaluation (planning, structuring, implementing, or recycling),

> the evaluation design is focused by identifying the level of decision to be served, projecting the decision situation, defining criteria for each decision situation, and defining policies for the evaluator. After that the requisite information is collected, organized, analyzed, and

reported. Each phase is broken down into sub tasks for the evaluator (House, 1980, p. 28).

Another evaluator who espouses the decision-making approach is Michael Patton. He emphasizes the identification and organization of relevant decision makers. The decision makers are responsible for determining what information the evaluation should collect, and the evaluators are responsible for getting that information to the decision makers. Questions usually involve the effectiveness of the program, and in particular, which parts of the program are working (House, 1980). One of the advantages of this approach is that it narrows the focus of the evaluation for the evaluator.

The utility of the information gained from this type of evaluation is obvious, but utility alone cannot be the only criteria of an effective evaluation. "One would not want a useful evaluation that was also untrue or unfair. Utility must be balanced against other considerations" (House, 1980, p. 231).

Ways to deter the use of an evaluation in an unethical way include expanding the decision making groups, ensuring that the participants in the evaluation remain anonymous, and providing the evaluation information to groups and individuals who are not in a decision making position.

Another consideration with this approach is that

> problems arise when the evaluator tries to define the specific decisions to be served. Decisions are not usually expressed in clear alternatives, and in fact, it is often the case that the decisions to be served do not emerge until after the evaluation is done. Also, the decisions change shape dramatically over time. Decisions that determine the fate of a program are often not those anticipated by the evaluator (House, 1980, p. 231).

Thus it is much more difficult than it would appear to identify the specific decisions that will effect the fate of the program (Stufflebeam, 1968).

The case study approach. This approach focuses on how people view the program and the processes within the program. The major question of the evaluation is often, "What does the program look like to the individuals involved with it?" The methodology is almost entirely qualitative, and usually involves interviews with many people, observations on the program site, and the presentation of the findings in a case study (Stake, 1981).

"The aim of the approach is to improve the understanding of the reader or audience of the evaluation, primarily by showing them how others perceive the program being evaluated" (House, 1980, p. 39). A leading figure in the use of the case study approach is Stake. The case study provides rich information that is not available form other approaches. It is also the most democratic approach, in that it facilitates the representation of diverse points of view.

The problems with this approach arise more out of what is emphasized than out of what is true or false. "Different observers report different events. Although these issues have been discussed often, methodological consistency and interpretation remain primary problems in case study credibility" (House, 1980, p. 244).

Discussion

Any approach, or "model" of evaluation can be appropriate or inappropriate depending on the situation and the assumptions of the evaluator. (House, 1980). Stake (1975) stressed that there was no one correct way of carrying out a program evaluation, but there are many choices. "You will seldom carry out an evaluation study that is designed entirely around one model" (Blackburn, 1984, p. 99). This evaluation was guided by Stufflebeam's premise that "The most important purpose of program evaluation is not to prove but to improve" (Stufflebeam, 1983, p. 118).

There are two elements at the core of evaluation: measurement-description and comparison-judgment. "Measurement is the process of providing data as to status and amount" (Brack, 1982, p. 52). Comparison-judgment is the process of assigning worth and value.

It is crucial to have both a definitive purpose and an apparent user for the findings of an evaluation. Therefore, the decision-makers who will use the results of the evaluation should be identified. When talking with them, an evaluator should find out what type of decisions they will be making and the nature of information they will need to make these decisions (Blackburn, 1984). "All modern evaluation approaches suggest a connection between evaluation and decision-making, although who the decision-makers are and how the decisions shall be made vary" (House, 1980, p.28). This connection to the decision-making approach was evident in the larger Gerontology Certificate program evaluation. The decision makers were identified as the program administrators, and the questions that they wanted addressed involved the effectiveness of the program, and in particular, which parts of the program are working and which are not. The underlying principle in designing the study was to be flexible and accommodate the needs of those who use results of the study (Blackburn, 1984).

The research of this thesis had more in common with the case study approach. In the focus groups the students were petitioned for their view of the program. The purpose of this research was to improve the understanding of the decision-makers and other readers by informing them how students perceived the program.

Another guiding force of this research was the hierarchy of evidence in program evaluation developed by Claude Bennett. The hierarchy of evidence, as stated in his 1975 article: "Up The Hierarchy," answers the question: what do we evaluate? At the lower level of the hierarchy of evidence are the inputs into the program; at the upper level are the end results of the program. The data collection becomes more complex and costly as you move up the hierarchy. Table 1 portrays how this hierarchy of evidence relates to an evaluation of the Gerontology Program.

Table 1

EXAMPLE OF A HIERARCHY OF EVIDENCE USING THE GERONTOLOGY CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

Level of Evidence	Certificate Program Data Sources/Evidence
7. End results	Improved client service.
6. Practice change	Participant actions with clients and colleagues.
5. KASA* change	The change in participants KASA about the field of gerontology.
4. Reactions	Reactions from participants about the program. For example likes, dislikes, and recommended changes.
3. People involvement	Number of individuals enrolled in the program. Number of participants completing a course. (For example active and inactive students.)
2. Activities	How participants used the course materials. Types of and completion of assignments. Attendance at any courses and practicum.
1. Inputs	Time preparing course materials. Cost of printing and distribution. Staff time devoted to meeting with subject area experts. Nature of instructor development. Cost of advertising.

* KASA refers to Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills, and Aspirations

As Bennett describes it, the evidence of the impact of the program becomes stronger as you move up the hierarchy. The research of this thesis focused on level four and five.

Participation in Continuing Education

The Certificate Program in Gerontology, like many adult education programs, does not have a captive audience; "it is a sector where participants vote with their feet" (Ruddock, 1989, p. 217). Thus to better serve the participant it is necessary to recognize their expectations, motivations, and experiences. Because students participating in continuing education were the center of this research it seemed appropriate to look at what motivated them to participate in continuing education. Apps (1980) stated that adults return to school for a variety of reasons, including a desire for professional growth, long range economic security, increased salary benefits, social status and prestige, family and peer opinions and expectations, and expectations of authority figures.

The students in this Program are active professionals in their field, and so it will be interesting to inquire as to their reflection upon their change in their knowledge, skills, and attitudes as a result of participating in this Program. "The enhanced possibilities arise from the capacity of the adult to reflect and report on his/her own experience. In the process of evaluation, adult learners will be subjects rather than objects" (Ruddock, 1989, p. 216).

One of the first individuals to study the reasons adults give for returning to education was Houle. His 1961 work, The Inquiring Mind detailed three major groups of "learning orientations." In the first group were goal oriented individuals. These people used education to achieve a clearly defined goal or task. The second group were activity oriented individuals who gained fulfillment in the social aspects of the activity. The third group were learning oriented individuals who sought knowledge for knowledge's sake. In 1971 Burgess expanded Houle's three major groups to seven more specific groups. He identified the following seven reasons for participating in adult education: knowledge acquisition, personal goals, social goals, religious goals, social activity, escape routine , and fulfill formal requirements.

Another important study in this area was that of Johnstone and Rivera (1965). They took a different approach to the study of participation in continuing education by examining demographic characteristics from a comprehensive study of individuals with diverse backgrounds from across the United States. They described the "typical" adult education participant as follows: equally likely to be male or female, normally under 40 years old, with at least a high school education, have an above average income, work full-time, more likely to be employed in a white collar occupation, married with children, most often white and Protestant, lived in an urban area, and are found in all parts of the United States (Johnstone & Rivera, 1965). It seems that these findings have stood the test of time, and have been confirmed by other studies (Cross, 1977; Rose, 1981; Brown, 1990).

One finding particularly pertinent to this research is the fact that "more than any other single characteristic, education was most closely related to the interests, motivations, and participation rates of adult learners" (Graham, 1985). It would appear that the more education individuals have the more they participate in continuing education activities (Cross, 1977; Cross, Tough & Weathersby, 1978).

Due to the entrance requirements (outlined in the definitions section) all of the individuals who participated in this Certificate Program had some form of formal education after the completion of high school. This type of entrance requirement might affect the finding of others that the more education a person has the more likely they are to participate in continuing education activities.

To try to increase our understanding of the complex motivations of adult learners researchers have categorized learners in different ways. Apps (1980) gives a variety of reasons for adult participation, and Houle divides participants into three groups of "learning orientations." While theses artificial groupings do facilitate our understanding it is important to realize that adult learners are very complex and may fit into all of Houle's categories with varying degrees of emphasis. Regarding Apps' reasons for adults returning to education, for most adults these reasons are not static over the entire learning period or life span. Also the variety of reasons as well as the intensity of those reasons for an adults participation in education can change during the educational experience, and as they age and gain new life experiences.

Much of the research referred to regarding participation in continuing education was conducted in the form of self reports. When viewing this research it is important to consider the unconscious motivations that are present in all adults. An individual might be participating because of a desire for social status, or to fulfill family or peer exceptions, but be unwilling, or unable to admit it to themselves or to a researcher. The complexity of the learner is always important to keep in mind when looking at any area of adult education.

Participation in Continuing Professional Education

Because this research looks at professionals who are continuing their education it is important for us to focus on continuing professional education (CPE) as a distinct type of continuing education. "The specialized status of continuing professional education affects how we conceptualize, study, and practice it" (Grotelueschen, 1985, p. 34). This assertion is based on the observation that continuing professional education's population characteristics are different, the type of participation is different, and those who benefit from the education of professionals are different than those of general continuing education. This section of the literature review will look at the modes of participation in CPE, what motivates individuals to participate, what deters individuals from participation, and other factors affecting participation such as zest for learning, and an individual's age and career stage.

Because CPE targets particular occupational groups, the population is more homogeneous than the universe of adults in general. While some characteristics (like level of education) are important predictors of educational participation in the general adult population, within the professions level of education is relatively constant. Most individuals in the professions have a relatively high level of education when compared to the rest of the adult population.

The nature of participation in CPE is also an important consideration. In general adult learners are voluntary, but in CPE participation is often somewhat less voluntary (sometimes mandatory), and in some cases it is required because of employer or professional expectations. The third consideration concerns who benefits from the educational participation. It is obvious that in both continuing education and in CPE, the learner benefits from the education. But implied within CPE is the idea that those once removed from the educational activity will benefit from it: the clients or patients (Grotelueschen, 1985).

Participation in continuing professional education (CPE) is not an end in it self, but rather it should be the means to the end of the facilitation of learning (Cervero, 1988). This view has been supported by other researchers. "It is our interest, therefore, to treat participation as a means and to attend to the issue of what it can bring about, such as remediation, growth, and change, rather than to what brought it about, such as peer pressure, mandating, and so on" (Grotelueschen, 1985). There are many forces, external to the educator, which support the idea that fostering greater participation should be the central goal of CPE. For example, when recredentialing professionals (the meeting of a standard to obtain continued approval of a licensee to remain practicing) the time spent in CPE, rather than demonstrated learning, is used as a measure. Nevertheless, fostering participation in CPE is an important issue, and will be the focus of this section of the literature review.

Modes of Participation

Several characteristics of professionals that influence their involvement in learning activities are described in Continuing Learning In The Professions Houle (1980). This book describes three "major and overlapping modes of learning" (p.31) as instruction, inquiry, and performance. Continuing professional educators are mainly interested in instruction, but in order to see CPE holistically it is important to understand the other modes of learning. Inquiry is described as the

> process of creating some new synthesis, idea, technique, policy, or strategy of action. Sometimes this mode is employed in a structured fashion; discussion and encounter groups, seminars, clinics, and guided experiences can be used to help people achieve new ideas or

> new ways of thinking, though the outcomes of the process cannot be predicted in advance. More frequently in this mode, learning is a by-product (thought sometimes an intended by-product) of efforts directed primarily at establishing policy, seeking consensus, working out compromises, and projecting plans.... (p. 31)

Performance is described as the:

> process of internalizing an idea or using a practice habitually, so that it becomes a fundamental part of the way in which a learner thinks about and undertakes his or her work. In pre-service professional education, the mode of performance is used chiefly in "practical" or clinical teaching, where it is inculcated by drill, by close supervision, by clinical presentations, and by long continued demonstration on the part of those who provide instruction. During the years of practice, the mode of performance may be fostered by the formal use of other modes of learning, but it may also be reinforced by rewards and punishments that require individuals and groups to maintain and improve their abilities and to avoid obsolescence. (p. 33).

Instruction is described as the:

> process of disseminating established skills, knowledge, or sensitiveness. Those who use it assume that the teacher (a person, book, or any other source) already knows or is designed to convey everything that the student will learn.... The degree of success of the mode of instruction is measured by the achievement by the student of goals that are usually known to the teacher at the beginning of a learning episode – though they may be modified during its process. (p. 32).

In Effective Continuing Education for Professionals, Cervero (1988) called the three processes Houle described as modes of participation rather than modes of learning. Participation provides the opportunity for learning but does not guarantee that it will occur. Thus one could say that participation in a learning activity does not equal learning. Therefore Cervero's terminology seems to be more accurate than Houle's, but Houle's description provides a broader perspective to the field of CPE, which often focuses on the instructional mode and ignores the importance of performance and inquiry (Cervero, 1988).

Motivation For Participation

It is widely thought that if educators could better understand what motivates professionals to participate in CPE they could then foster that participation. "Unfortunately, a theory of motivation does not exist to guide the research in this area" (Cervero, 1989, p. 63). The research appears to focus on different aspects of motivation, and no proven explanation has been given of how all these profiles of motivation fit together.

The reasons for participating and deterrents from participation in CPE are the most commonly examined areas of situational and personal influences. Some of the most valid and reliable research in this area has come from Arden Grotelueschen. In this writing "educational participation is understood to include involvement in formal educational activities for professionals that are typically short-term, part-time or both" (Grotelueschen, 1985, p. 33). This definition is accurate for most studies of participation in CPE, unless it is a study of participation in self - directed learning. Grotelueschen and others developed an instrument called the Participation Reason Scale (PRS) which measures both traditional and nontraditional reasons for participating in CPE. Traditional reasons are associated with professional development, and the improvement and quality of professional service. "The less traditional reasons are related to personal benefits and job security, collegial learning and interaction, and reflection on and commitment to the state of one's profession and one's relationship to it" (Grotelueschen, 1985 p. 38).

The PRS identifies five clusters of reasons for participation in CPE:

a) professional improvement and development,

b) professional service,

c) collegial learning and interaction,

d) professional commitment and reflection, and

e) personal benefits and job security.

Items administered to physicians that exemplify these clusters include the following, respectively:

a) to maintain my current abilities,

b) to help me increase the likelihood that patients are better served,

c) to be challenged by the thinking of my medical colleagues,

d) to maintain my identity with my profession, and

e) to enhance my individual security in my present medical profession (Grotelueschen, 1985, p. 41).

An understanding of reasons for the learners participation is crucial to effective planning. If professional improvement and development are important to the learners, then it would follow that they would want practical suggestions that relate directly to their practice. Another example of how PRS can be helpful in planning is if collegial learning and interaction are valued by the learner. In this circumstance curriculum planning and instructional techniques should facilitate this interaction. (Grotelueschen, 1985).

The findings from the PRS research have shown that there are differences in the reasons for participation. Studies according to professions show that nurses, social workers, pharmacists, health educators, and physicians participate in CPE mainly for professional improvement and development, followed by professional service, collegial learning and interaction, professional commitment and reflection, and personal benefits and job security.

The degree of importance attached to each reason differs significantly for individual professions. For example, nurses and social workers rate the professional improvement and development and service clusters more important than do physicians and business executives. Also, there are significant collegial learning and interaction differences between age and professional groups for a participation reason (Grotelueschen, 1985). There are also differences within a given profession. These differences can often be explained by understanding the work and role responsibilities of each group; the setting of the professional makes a difference as to what is valued. For example, pharmacists in hospital settings are more focused on improving patient service than are non-hospital pharmacists (Grotelueschen, 1985). The state of the economy would also probably make a difference as to what each profession valued. When economic times are bad I would postulate that personal benefits and job security may have more of an influence on CPE decisions.

There are several implications of the findings of the PRS that should be considered by researchers and practitioners.

> First, the most common focus of continuing professional education programming, professional improvement and development, is only one of many reasons why professionals participate in continuing education. Second, professionals differ in the importance that they ascribe to these reasons for participation, both across and within disciplines. Third, differences in reasons for participation within disciplines suggest that professionals undergo a developmental evolution in regard to educational expectations. Fourth, differences in reasons for participation across disciplines suggest that educational expectations vary with characteristics specific to individual professions (Grotelueschen, 1985, p. 42).

These findings can provide useful information in the planning, implementation and evaluation of a continuing professional education program. This research will be discussed further in conjunction with the findings reported in this thesis.

Deterrents to Participation

Although understanding what motivates participation in CPE it is also valuable to assess the deterrents to participation. Scalan and Darkenwald (1984), described six types of deterrents to participation. The first was labeled "disengagement" and was seen in individuals who had general apathy regarding participation in CPE. The second was a general dissatisfaction with the quality of CPE programs offered. The third deterrent was family constraints. The cost of attending the program was the fourth deterrent. The fifth deterrent was labeled "lack of benefit," and was highlighted by the professionals' view that the CPE had no relative worth. The final deterrent was called "work constraints" and involved scheduling difficulties.

It was shown that these six deterrents did predict non-participation in CPE. The relative importance of the deterrents in predicting non-participation were as follows: disengagement was most influential, then cost, family constraints, lack of benefit, lack of quality, and work constraints. It is important to note that four out of the six factors can be directly influenced by program developers and marketing (lack of quality, cost, lack of benefit, and work constraints) (Cervero, 1988). But it is also important to be aware that the most influential deterrents of disengagement and family constraints are very difficult for program development to affect.

Other Factors That Influence Participation

In addition to motivation and deterrents there are several other factors that influence participation. The zest for learning is also considered a major influence on the extent to which professionals participate in CPE (Houle, 1980). Professionals have many personality traits and attitudes that either encourage or discourage their participation in CPE. Houle (1980) suggested that this zest for learning was inextricably related to participation. "The extent of the desire for an individual to learn ultimately controls the amount and kind of education he or she undertakes" (Houle, 1980, p.124). He stated that participants can be classified into four general groups based upon attitude toward practice. The first and smallest group are the innovators. They continually seek new ideas in an effort to improve practice, and are not afraid to take a risk. The second group are the pacesetters who value new ideas but are not willing to take the risk. They strongly support their profession as well as instructional activities. The third group is the largest; they are called the middle majority. Because this group is so large their views on participation range for enthusiasm to apathy. The final group are the laggards who only want to learn what they must in order to stay practicing within the profession (Houle, 1980).

Age and career stage also appear to be important factors in the type and extent of professionals participation in CPE. "A nearly universal finding is that older professionals tend to participate in fewer formal educational activities than younger professionals" (Cervero, 1989, p.70). Literature is starting to develop on the career stages of certain professions, including professors, the clergy, and teachers. But more importantly for continuing professional educators, Dalton, Thompson and Price (1977) have developed a cross-professional developmental model. This career stage approach offers the ability to program planners to meet the needs of professionals at various stages of their career (Cervero, 1989).

The basic setting of a professional's practice can also have a large influence on the extent to which he or she participates in educational activities. Houle (1980) identified the five most common settings as: entrepreneurial, collective, hierarchical, adjunct and facilitative. "It appears that professionals working in each setting have access to different ranges and types of educative activities and may have different types of learning needs. As a result, professionals' work setting is an important factor to consider as continuing educators seek to foster greater levels of participation" (Cervero, 1989, p. 71).

The mandatory nature of continuing education also influences the extent to which professionals participate in educational activities, although the effect is still debated. This issue has been studied by measuring the participation before and then after CPE legislation was brought in. This type of study has been done on several different professional groups, and notably the results have been quite similar. The results "show that 70 to 75 percent of the members of each profession who participated in formal educational programs reported little or no change in there rate of participation in CPE after the implementation of mandatory continuing education requirements. The greatest changes occur in the remaining 25 to 30 percent, who may be the laggard described by Houle" (Cervero, 1989, p.73).

Concluding Remarks

The literature shows that CPE is influenced by dimensions of: 1) the professional's reasons for and deterrents to participation, 2) their zest for learning, 3) their age and career stages, 4) the nature of practice settings, and 5) the extent to which they are required to participate in continuing education.

It is important to consider the goal of a particular CPE program because it will guide the assumptions made regarding the learners, providers, content and process of that program. (Cervero, 1989). The values that are incorporated in content and process are not usually explicit but rather implied through structures and strategies. It is these values and goals that form the underlying assumptions which influence the plans and activities designed to lead to learning (Brundage & Mackeracher, 1980). These underlying values and assumptions are generally not reported in the studies outlining CPE programs.

An important part of any program evaluation is reflection on what the providers of the CPE program see as the goal of CPE, and what they value in the learning situation. It is also necessary to consider how these values and goals are reflected in the program. This should include: teaching-learning interactions, content, process, interactions with students and other professionals in the field, the employers, and the clients served by the professional.

Within the literature little is known about the participation in CPE of individuals in the field of gerontology. Because many of the individuals pursuing CPE in Gerontology are members of other professional groups information gained from studies of these groups such as nurses, social workers, and pharmacists could be informative. In addition information about participants in non-credit certificate programs is also very limited, so it was necessary to look at general participation in continuing education.

Another issue that is not addressed in the literature is the effect that the participants of CPE have on their coworkers and pears. Literature has focused on the effects of CPE participation upon the client groups of the individual. But I would ask what effect does this new learning have on individuals relationship with their coworkers, peers, and those who they see as in a position of authority? Does the new attitudes, knowledge, or skills gained by these participants effect policies, procedures, decisions, staff development or staff orientation in their work place? These are important questions that further research could pursue.

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of students in a Certificate Program in Gerontology at the University of Alberta. This included their expectations of the program, contributions to professional development as a result of the program, and reactions to the program. This chapter outlines the research methodology including how this study fit into a broader program evaluation, an overview of focus group methodology, instrumentation, and data collection, procedures and analysis.

Study Context

The Certificate Program in Gerontology at the University of Alberta Faculty of Extension has been in operation since the fall of 1989. This continuing professional development program "is designed to expand, enrich and improve the knowledge of those planning and providing services to the older person; to provide interdisciplinary education in gerontology by building on undergraduate training from many disciplines; and to provide an understanding of research, theory, and practice" (University of Alberta, 1992, p. 11).

The focus of this research, which was the experiences of students, arose out of a larger program evaluation of The Certificate Program in Gerontology during the 1992 - 1993 academic year. This section briefly describes the development of both studies.

As described in chapter one the evaluation sub-committee of the Advisory Committee of this Program recommended in 1992 that an evaluation of the Certificate Program in Gerontology was needed. This was in partial fulfillment of the evaluation requirement outlined in the original program proposal. As a graduate assistant from the Department of Adult, Career and Technology Education I was employed to work on this project under the direction of Dr. Wayne Lamble, Director, Applied Sciences Program. The major objectives of this formative evaluation were:

1. to gather information for the purpose of facilitating effective decision-making with regards to the program;

2. to foster communication and team work among all the stakeholders of the program; and

3. to facilitate the focusing of the goals, objectives, and operations of the program.

There were seven components of the Program selected as the basis of the data collection: the Advisory Committee, instructors, community stakeholders, inactive students, active students, program graduates, and program documents.

In the Certificate Program evaluation the extent of data collection and analysis of student experiences would be limited to the objectives of the study which were achieved through the use of a questionnaire. Therefore I saw the opportunity to further investigate the students' expectations, development and reactions. A proposal for an expansion of the active student and graduate component of the evaluation was discussed with the Director of The Applied Sciences Program. The process of focus group interviews with the active students and graduates was agreed upon.

Focus Groups

Focus groups build on the psychological theory of symbolic interactionism which asks "what common set of symbols and understandings have emerged to give meaning to people's interactions?" (Patton, 1990, p.75). To understand human behavior (for example, program participation), one must have insight into interpretive processes. It is critical to realize that many of the decisions that program participants make regarding a program come from their discussions with other students (Patton, 1990). "Groups are not just a convenient way to accumulate the individual knowledge of their members. They give rise synergistically to insights and solutions that would not come about without them" (Brown et al., 1989, p. 40).

A focus group is a group interview, not a discussion, problem solving session, or a decision making group. The participants are asked to reflect on questions about a specific topic. An individual responds to a question or comment and can then make additional responses to the same issue as he/she hears the responses of other participants. No consensus is needed, as people can agree or disagree. "The object is to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others" (Patton, 1990, p. 335).

The data collection involves conducting interviews with groups of 5 to 10 people focused on a topic or issue that affects them. Generally, the design of the questions is flexible, tending to develop as the researcher follows what is relevant to the topic for a particular group. According to Kifer (1991) even though focus groups are a "soft" form of information "they are, in fact, powerful ways to collect important information about the product or process being studied" (Anglin, 1991, p. 357).

There appear to be many advantages to the use of focus groups. First, they are a notably effective qualitative data collection technique. Second, focus groups can increase the sample size when compared to individual interviews. Third, because the participants sometimes point out extreme views, the group provides some quality controls. Fourth, the direction of the group's discussion tends to point out key program issues. Fifth, inconsistency between the views of the program participants is relatively easy to identify (Patton, 1990).

Focus group interviews can be conducted during a program to distinguish strengths, weaknesses, and possible improvements. Thus it is used as a formative evaluation tool. Conversely, focus group interviews can be conducted months after a program is completed to gather perceptions about outcomes and the impact of the program (Patton, 1990). By incorporating both active students and recent graduates, this research addressed both possibilities.

Instrumentation And Data Collection

Due to its efficiency, economy, and anonymity, a questionnaire was selected as the main source of data collection from students in the larger Certificate Program evaluation. Participants of the active student focus group were recruited through this questionnaire.

Bennett's (1975) model from the article "Up The Hierarchy" gave perspective when questions of the focus groups were formulated. This hierarchy of evidence in program evaluation answers the question: what do we evaluate? My study focused on two of the seven levels of the hierarchy (steps 4 and 5). Students were asked their opinions on the changes in their knowledge, attitudes, skills, and aspirations (KASA), and were asked to give examples of these changes (research question 2). Information was also obtained regarding the students' reactions to the program. These reactions include the students' expectations, what they liked, disliked, and suggestions for changing the program (research questions 1, 3 and 4).

Table 2

Level of Evidence

7. End results

6. Practice change (this information is usually gained through observation)

5. Change in Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills, and Aspirations (KASA) (this information is usually gained through the self reports of the learners)

4. Reactions of participant

3. People involvement (actual numbers of people registered in and completing the program)

2. Activities (activities engaged in during the program, including the completion of course work and attendance)

1. Inputs (time spent preparing materials, advertising, and all costs)

Although the evidence is more difficult and expensive to obtain the higher up the hierarchy, the value of the information increases. This is because the impact of the program becomes more obvious as you gather evidence up the hierarchy. (Bennett, 1975).

Interview Questions

The focus group questions were developed by the researcher, with the guidance of two professors from the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. These questions were then reviewed and approved by the Program

Director. Four general research questions were modified to fit an interview format and were used with both student groups.

1. What were your expectations of this Program?
    - A. Why did you begin this program?
    - B. What did you expect in terms of course work and outcomes?
    - C. How has the program met your expectations? How has it not?
2. How has this program contributed to your professional development in the following areas of gerontology:
    - A. Your understanding of the field of gerontology?
    - B. Your attitudes towards this area?
    - C. Your skills in the area of gerontology?
    - D. Your future goals in this field?
3. What were your reactions to the program?
    - A. What did you like about the program?
    - B. What did you not like about the program?
4. What suggestions do you have for changes to the program?

Pilot Testing and Revision.

The pilot testing of the interview questions was very useful and interesting. It was conducted in March by a professor and myself with two groups of students in a research course ED ACT 595 at the Department of Adult Career and Technology Education at the University of Alberta. Each interview group contained seven students, and lasted approximately 40 minutes. The professor, who was an expert in the use of focus group interviews in research, simulated two interviews using the research questions from this study. These focus group interviews were used to demonstrate this form of data collection to the students, including myself. Also, the simulation served as a pilot of the clarity of the questions for a similar sample.

I gained several things from this experience. I went through the steps of preparing for a focus group, I saw how an expert handled the introduction, explanation of the process, and ethical considerations. I also observed and tape recorded how the professor facilitated the group process. I was able to participate in a dialogue with the professor and the participants following the simulations about the most effective way to conduct a focus group. From listening to the recording of these interviews, the interview schedule was finalized for the two focus group interviews.

The interview questions were revised at several points in their development. The first revisions which helped clarify the questions came after discussions with my thesis supervisor, and research course professor and class mates. The second revisions occurred after a series of meetings with my thesis committee, and the final revisions took place after the pilot test was complete. I had originally intended to ask more detailed questions with several probes. Throughout the pilot test I realized that there would not be enough time for such detailed questions.

Recruitment

The two distinct groups of students were recruited for the focus groups, in three different ways, in February, March and April 1993. Eleven of the 13 individuals who graduated from the program in 1992 were called at the beginning of April and invited to participate (two individuals no longer lived in the Edmonton area). Verbal confirmation of their attendance was confirmed by telephone, and a letter was sent to them (Appendix C). Of the eleven contacted seven participated on April 20 from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m.

Recruitment of the active students took place in two ways. First, those students who participated in one of the two courses being offered in the winter semester were recruited through an invitation contained in the written survey distributed during class (this was the broader program evaluation questionnaire). Second, those students who were active (who had taken a course in the last two years) but were not currently taking a course were recruited during the broader program evaluation mail-out questionnaire. Those who agreed to participate were sent a confirmation letter and the interview took place April 14 from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. The agenda of the focus group interviews, interview schedule, consent form, and correspondence are in Appendix C.

To ensure the confidentiality of the respondents individuals were asked to fill out and return a separate sheet with the questionnaire to indicate their interest in participating in this specific study. The returned sheets were separated from the questionnaire as soon as they were received. These individuals were then called and given more information. If they indicated that they were interested they were sent a letter outlining the details of the focus group interview.

Ethical Considerations

In this study confidentiality and anonymity were maintained in that participants names are not used in any way, so that the responses used in the study cannot be traced back to the individuals who made them. The information gathered in the interviews was not shared with employers, instructors or Program personnel (except the Director). I also asked the participants to keep the opinions expressed by others during the interview confidential. Informed consent was obtained from the students at the beginning of the interview by having them sign a consent form after the study was explained to them. They were informed of their right to opt out of the study at any time, and were given an opportunity to ask questions. Each participant consented.

Access to the data was restricted to myself, the Program Director, and my thesis supervisor. To ensure reliability I asked my thesis supervisor to review the data to confirm the themes that I identified from the interviews. The tapes of the interviews were erased after the study was complete.

Sample

The population of this study included all individuals participating in or having recently graduated from a certificate program in gerontology. The sample of this qualitative study were the students of the Certificate Program in Gerontology at the Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta. There were 35 active students and 13 graduates. The graduates of the program completed their course work in the spring of 1992. This was the first graduating class of the Program.

There were 11 individuals invited to attend the graduate focus group, and 7 participated. Fourteen active students indicated an interest in participating in a focus group; 8 agreed to attend, and 5 actually attended. Of all the focus group participants only one was a man. The average age of Program participants was 40, with 85% of them having worked in the field. Fifty eight percent of the Program participants had a university degree. Twenty percent were registered nurses (2 or 3 year program), and 22% had a diploma.

Time-Line

Recruitment of active students through the use of the Program evaluation questionnaire took place in January and February of 1993. Follow-up phone calls occurred in March, with information letters going out in early April. The recruitment of the program graduates took place over the telephone in early April with a letter following shortly.

The **pilot test** of the interview questions took place in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta in mid March. The questions and procedures were revised and the two **focus group interviews** were held in mid April in a classroom at the Faculty of Extension. Both of the focus groups were scheduled on a Wednesday evening from 7:30 to 9:00 to accommodate most participants' work schedules. The tables were arranged into a circle, and each participant, the interviewer, and assistant had name cards, and refreshments were served.

The tapes of the two interviews were **transcribed** by mid-May, and **data analysis** using the computer program Sonar Professional began shortly after. This program was used initially to test and confirm themes, but was also used as a way of sorting the data, and "cutting and pasting" parts of the data that traditionally were done by hand. I emulated the traditional "cut-up-and-put-in-folders" approach by printing off data as it was sorted by the computer. This process is discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Data Analysis

This study concentrated on the perceptions of the students' own experiences. These data were gathered through the use of focus group interviews. The analysis involved bring order to the data by placing them into patterns and categories.

The starting point for the analysis of the data was the specific interview questions, which concentrated on the perceptions of the students. The overall plan was to analyze data for themes/issues that reappeared between the two groups of respondents. In this process the focus group guide functioned as a descriptive framework for my analysis (Patton, 1990).

The analysis of the focus group data was complex and took place at several levels. It began by reviewing a printout of the transcripts in order to become familiar with the data. The printed transcripts had a wide margin and the text was broken into many paragraphs. Each page was numbered sequentially and no number was repeated (to facilitate the locating data) (Bogdan, 1992). The next step was to analyze the respondents' comments.

During the review and summary of the respondents' comments, a comparison was made of the words used in answering the same questions. It was necessary to ask: "are the words identical, similar, related, or unrelated?" It was crucial to consider the context of the comments, and how the discussions evolved. A note was made of the words which had similar meanings, and were used in the same way, for example electives, seminars and workshops. These groups of words became codes which were eventually grouped together and organized into major codes, and sub-codes. This would make the searches using the computer program Sonar Professional more efficient. Words that were used in searches included: transfer/credit, research, electives/seminars/workshops, instructors/professors, knowledge, skills, attitudes, professional development, like, dislike, change, work, time, adult, content and courses.

Considering the intensity and internal consistency of the comments was also important. This was noted while reviewing the transcripts, and the tape recordings. Still another consideration was the specificity of the response, and the examples given. Comments that were made with examples are usually more helpful in explaining a theme, and so were highlighted. As all of these factors are considered, it becomes obvious that the analysis of focus group data is very complex (Krueger, 1988).

Content analysis of the main issues in the data through identifying, coding and categorizing the information was conducted with use of the computer program, Sonar Professional. This program is very similar to, but more powerful and versatile than, the search or find function that is contained in most word processing programs. The process used with the computer was very similar to the traditional "cut and past" method that is done by hand. But by using the computer the process was quicker, and more efficient. Words, synonyms, and relationships between words could be searched for and highlighted without fear of missing any, and parts of text could be grouped together in several different ways with relative ease. Frequencies of responses (themes/issues) were tabulated by the computer and are presented in the following chapter.

Sonar Professional was only used as a tool of analysis, it was still necessary to be very familiar with the data, and develop hypothesis regarding its potential themes. While reviewing the data printout (described earlier), I began to develop a preliminary list of coding categories based on the frequency and stated importance of an issue or idea. At that time I also found it beneficial to make a list of ideas and to draw diagrams that show the connection between different codes or ideas (Bogdan, 1992). By using Sonar Professional it was possible to see how frequently two words were related to each other in the text.

For example the program would highlight every time the words change or dislike, and the words credit, or transferability were found together (i.e. 20 words apart). It is then up to the researcher to read each passage of text to determine if the two words are related.

After developing this preliminary list of codes I selected abbreviations and assigned them to appropriate parts of the data. This was a test to see how effective the coding categories were. At that time I modified the categories, and created a new one. "It is important to realize that you are not attempting to come up with the right coding system, or even the best. What is right or best differs according to your aims" (Bogdan, 1992, p.176). These codes incorporated ideas that had the most evidence as well as ideas I wanted to explore. These ideas were tested and retested by using the computer to search for the terms and group them together. For example every statement that was made regarding the issue of transferability was grouped together to see if a theme existed, and what other issues it might be related to.

Coding categories were organized into major codes and sub-codes as described earlier in this chapter. The major codes were broad and general, combining a wide range of behaviors, activities, and attitudes. The sub-codes were used to break the major codes into smaller categories. An example of this was program delivery as a major code with timing, method of delivery, and transferability as sub-codes. After the coding categories were developed they were each given a number for ease of comparison. I then went through the data and marked each section of text with the appropriate number (Bogdan, 1992).

It was also essential to ensure that the analysis process was systematic and had validity. This analysis was systematic in that it followed a prescribed, sequential process. The validity of the analysis was also assured by having an experienced researcher review the data and the themes that I had determined. Time was allowed in the analyses for a distancing of the researcher, and a conscious effort was made to approach the data from several angles. The conclusions that I prepared were supported by available evidence. Evidence that repeats and was common to several participants was identified. Results of the analysis are reported in the next chapter.

Chapter IV

Findings and Discussion

The primary purpose of any evaluation is to establish the worth, or value of something. A better understanding of what is being studied will result from the evaluation, and thus lead to improved decision making. In attempting to understand the experiences of the students in the Certificate Program in Gerontology it is expected that the information acquired will provide new insights about the program and its effectiveness.

Responses to Research Questions

Although the data from these two groups were collected in separate focus group interviews, the findings indicate that there were no major differences between them. Therefore, the results are presented jointly. The discussion in the graduate interview exhibited more depth and clarity, perhaps because the participants all knew each other very well. In addition, because they had completed the program, they had more program experiences and more time to reflect on these experiences. Both groups are referred to as students in this thesis, and the term "graduates" is used only when referring to information that applies to them exclusively. Both focus group interviews were conducted in April, 1993 at the Faculty of Extension.

Motivation of Students

As a type of ice-breaker I asked the participants their name, their occupation, and their motivation for pursuing the Certificate Program. These questions served two purposes: first, they functioned as an introduction so that all of the participants were aware of each other, and what brought them to the Program. Second, it allowed me to have a clearer understanding of who was participating, and why. This created a smooth facilitation, and an interactive atmosphere. For the comfort of the participants, the assistant who operated the tape recorder and myself also introduced ourselves.

The explanations that students gave regarding their motivation for pursuing the program were very broad. It was clear that motivation was not a simple factor, but rather a complex set of influences, as indicated in the literature review. No two students were motivated by the same factors. Although similar motivations were expressed by several, the combination of the motivating factors and the emphasis placed on each factor made every one different. Generally, the motives for pursuing this Certificate Program were described by the participants as firstly being related to work issues. For example, "I looked for something that would help with work." Secondly more personal issues were cited, such as "it was time to start learning again." A few participants also wanted to see if they could handle something at the "university level."

When discussing students' motivations for participating in continuing education, Apps, (1980) noted that adults return to school for several reasons, including a desire for professional growth, long range economic security, increased salary benefits, social status and prestige, family and peer opinions and expectations, and expectations of authority figures. Of these motivations, the students in this study most frequently mentioned reasons related to professional growth, such as "upgrading," "keeping up with the trends," and "being on top of policy changes."

As discussed in Chapter 2, Houle identified three major groups of "learning orientations"; goal oriented individuals, activity oriented individuals, and learning oriented individuals. Several individuals in this research showed, through their comments, membership in all three of the groups. One student gave the following reasons for pursuing the program: a desire to "interact and meet other people," "interest from the point of view that it could help with my work," and "it was time to start learning again."

One of the clearly defined goals or tasks that appeared to motivate some of the Gerontology Certificate students was the use of this Program as a measure of their ability to cope with learning at a university level. Students said, "I had not taken a university course and I wanted to see if I could handle it," "I looked for something at the university level, because I don't have a B.Sc. N. and would like to get my feet wet."

Expectations of the Program

The students were asked to describe their expectations of the program, and whether these expectations were met. It was found that the expectations of the program were exceeded with regard to the "caliber of the people involved." This included fellow students, instructors, and guest speakers. With respect to the expected level of the program, the graduates said "what we all needed in knowledge is what we got. We are all very experienced professional people. To take a program at a lower level would have been insulting." There was general agreement that "over all, when you talk about expectations of instructors and material both were generally really good." With regard to the expectations of the electives one student commented, "I have had no problem recommending them to any one at our office." But the students perceived that the amount of work that they were doing was equivalent to that of graduate level, and there was overwhelming agreement that the courses were all a lot of work. It does appear that to the students the appropriate level of expected work depends on the outcomes or expected recognition for the work that is done.

Unfortunately, the Introduction to Gerontology course did not meet many students' expectations; "many people were disillusioned with the introductory course, and we gradually lost numbers; I bet you that it was down to half of the initial group by the end of the fist year." "The amount of the work and the expectation that was involved in the Program had a lot to do with people dropping out."

The students interpreted the declining numbers of participants to indicate that the first course, Introduction to Gerontology, did not meet the expectations of the students who did not pursue the program further. The students felt that the work load was too high for the students who left the Program, relative to their expectations. To the students interviewed it appeared that these dropouts could handle the work load and the academic level of the course, but felt that they did not receive the necessary recognition for their work.

> I think we need to talk about the attrition of the classes. Some of the people who dropped out during and after the first course realized that based on the amount of work that they were doing they were not going to get credit for it and switched and started taking B.Sc. courses and that is what they did. So there were some who decided that if they were going to do the work they might as well get credit for it.

As indicated in the above quotes, there was a significant shortcoming of this Program in meeting expectations related to the lack of recognition. "When you finish certainly the information is valuable and has allowed me to do all sorts of things that I wanted to do, but my employer is still on my back for my B.Sc.;

they do not even recognize all the work that I have done ... I think that there is no recognition to what we went through." This unfulfilled expectation of recognition was a recurring theme throughout the focus group interviews, and as indicated by the quotes, it is closely tied to the work load of the courses.

Another student perspective on the attrition from the first class was that some members could not keep up with the academic level and work load of the course.

> One reason for problems in the introduction class was that there were individuals there who were non-professionals such as lodge managers and apartment managers who had absolutely no background other than their experience, and this made it very difficult because these people were learning at a very basic step and they did not understand what we were learning at and we were way past them.

Students also described a similar problem with individuals who were taking the course for interest sake, as opposed to those they termed "professionals." "Dealing with theses two types of backgrounds and interests you cannot expect the course to cover all the expectations of the whole group." Thus it would appear that there were conflicting expectations between the two levels of learners (professionals, and nonprofessionals).

Professional Development

The students were then asked how participating in the Program had contributed to their professional development. Professional development was defined as the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and aspirations (KASA). They were specifically asked how their understanding of the field of gerontology (knowledge), attitudes towards this area, skills in this area, and future goals in this field (aspirations) were changed by participation in this

Program. Although these changes can be intellectually broken down into separate entities (KASA), when analyzing the comments made by the participants the distinction is not so clear. It is clear, however, that growth through professional development is a complex, dynamic process involving all of the factors (KASA). It is interesting to note that even thought this question was intended to gather data from the 5th level of the Hierarchy of Evidence (outlined in Chapter 2) many of the answers indicated data form the 6th level.

The most frequently expressed area of new growth was that of knowledge, which the students indicated often lead to new skills, and sometimes to a change in attitude. One student indicated, "I have been prepared for issues that come up at work as a result of the information in the course, especially in the area of health policy." With regard to learning about research, two students stated, "if we had not had that course we would not have been able to put forward a proposal. So being able to follow up directly from what we took in the course was very useful and had a great pay off." Also regarding research a student said, "I strongly influenced my peers when we had the opportunity to apply for dollars in nursing research." She also said that she incorporated a lot of the knowledge that she gained into in-service presentations and into the "background kind of stuff when doing team planning." Another commented about the value of research, "The net effect is realizing the value of the research, because it was always something at a distance."

The participants generally agreed that "the program added to, validated and reinforced many of our attitudes." Along this line another student said,

> It gave you a ground for the attitude. Especially with funding and budgeting the way that it is when the focus is so much on discharge planning from my perspective and making sure that people can go home and having that interdisciplinary focus it let me know what was out there....and it used to be that all I ever heard about were the

> extended care facilities. It broadened my outlook as to who I need to contact and the whole focus of looking at a level of independence rather than doing things for them.

Some other examples of changed attitudes include: "I am sharing things I learned and attitudes of how to treat seniors with new students (nursing) and staff." "For me the two domains that I had my most learning were in attitudes and knowledge. I had to really confront my own ageism that I was unaware of." I found out that now I have a tendency to generalize less. My outlook on aging has really changed." "I have learned to focus more on the human elements in working with my clients."

Examples of the program's effect on participants' knowledge include: "It really stretched my horizons. It helped me to see the bigger picture ... I have been prepared for issues that come up at work as a result of the information in the courses." "For me it had triggered a need to learn more and more about aging. I'm now subscribing to several publications."

It would appear that this Program had a great effect on the participants' professional development. The students had an abundance of examples of how the program has changed them and their practice.

Likes and Dislikes

The students were also asked to give their reactions to the Program, and specifically what they liked and disliked about it. Many of their responses related to well know principles of adult education, such as learning is more effective if it is relevant to life experiences, both past and present, and adults learn from each others experiences. Adults prefer to have some control over the place, pace and time when they learn, with time often being limited because of other commitments (Apps, 1991; Brookfield, 1990; Brundage, 1980; Draves, 1984; Ferguson, 1989).

The aspect of the Program that the students appeared to like the most was its interdisciplinary focus. "I think that it is important to maintain the core courses as an interdisciplinary base." Others felt that this aspect of the program helped the students work together, and to maximize their use of resources. "Having that interdisciplinary focus it let me know what was out there." "The interdisciplinary aspect of the program is very worth while... it is nice to have some background that gave me credibility in the community and helped to reduce the myths."

They also approved of the interaction with other professionals in the field, including instructors and fellow students, and appreciated being treated like adult learners. "I needed the class for support, and the interaction and feedback from the instructors and students."

Many liked having the courses start at 6:30 p.m. rather than 7:00 p.m., and all liked it when the core course finished at the end of November. They particularly enjoyed some of the electives. "The electives were certainly good, I have had no problem recommending them to any one at our office." But they felt that these electives should be offered in the spring because it was too much work to participate in the core courses as well as electives. "A lot of the electives were offered at the same times as we were having assignments and final exams. This caused a great rush to get everything done." Overall, they thought that the instructors and material were good, and that there was a good variety of interesting courses and topics.

The most disliked aspect of the program was the lack of transferability and the perceived lack of recognition for the work that they had done. Students commented that, "they should give credit where credit is earned. If we are taking the same course that day time students are taking (referring to the core courses) and they get credit for it and our course is not transferable it is not fair and why the heck take it." "The University has to look at being more consumer oriented, because Grant MacEwan can have transferable courses... so why can't the University?" "What is so frustrating is that if we want to go on then we will have to take all of the core courses over again at the University because we did not get credit for it. So we do the work over again, spend extra time and money." They felt that this issue had a lot to do with the attrition from the program. "Some of the people who dropped out during and after the first course realized that based on the amount of work that they were doing they were not going to get credit for it and switched and started taking B.Sc. courses..."

> Because nobody in my work situation has given me any recognition that I have spent three years taking the courses, although I did not expect any monetary return... I do not think that they realized what we have put out to get here. I would go back to that ageism that exists, because it is not valued in our culture. But it is not even valued in the field that we are in.

Another thing that students disliked was the "excessive library work." They felt that the readings used in the course could be selected ahead of time to cut down on the time spent searching in the library.

> The other thing too is that we all work; we don't have the time to be trying to find things in the libraries. We need to be told exactly where to get the information. That would really encourage people to stay in the program ... Possibly the instructors could have the articles chosen ahead of time and give access to the material so that we can save some time ... The time it takes in the library is a really important barrier to those who commute, for example, from Camrose.

The students also disliked the repetition among classes, and felt that there could have been better coordination among all instructors. This included repetition between two or more core courses, and between core courses and electives. They were also concerned with the fact that the description in the brochure did not always reflect the true nature of the course. This was particularly true in the case of the Psychology core course, which they felt concentrated too much on research techniques at the expense of the information about psychology.

Students also felt that sometimes there were insufficient course offerings, poor organization or sequencing of courses, and too many scheduling changes. In addition, it was expressed that the electives should be offered so that they were not at the same times as the assignments and final exams of the core courses. Some students disliked the Integrated Seminar; they felt that it went too long, and was tedious.

Another issue identified by the students was that there were two different levels of learners in the program. "... as we mentioned, the two levels of the people. You are dealing at the professional level with someone who has taken some of these types of courses, verses somebody who is taking it for interest sake. Dealing with these two types of backgrounds, you can't expect the course to cover all of that for the whole group." It was suggested that the courses be offered at two levels: credit, and auditing.

Changes to the Program

When asked about changes they would recommend to the Program, students had a variety of comments. These suggestions seemed to fall into three categories: content (which refers to actual topics or information), structure (which is how the courses and assignments are set up), and program administration (how the program is administered).

In the area of content, students recommended that the research component of the psychology course be considered for its own elective or course on how to read, understand and critically analyze the research. They would also like to see the addition of more information in courses on trends, cross cultural issues, empowering seniors, community development models, needs of the young old, electives dealing with family issues, the rural elderly, wellness, and technology and the elderly. It was also suggested that an elective course could be built around attending a conference in the field of gerontology, and writing a paper about what was learned. With a greater selection of electives it would provide the students with a possibility of a specialized route.

Another idea suggested by the students was to provide time in a core course or elective to share information about the resources available in the community for seniors, and individuals who work with them. Although some students find this out through their discussions in class, it was felt that this learning could be made more formal and promoted to others working in the field.

Due to the problems that many of them encountered in using the library, they suggested "that right off the bat in the first core course, show the students how to use the library. We did have a tour of the medical library, but we were not shown how to access the information and use the computers in the rest of the libraries."

Some changes suggested by the students in the area of structure were that "it would have been helpful to have the readings more related to the essays that we had to do or the papers, because I know that it was very difficult to keep up with the readings that we had to do for the assignments and the course readings that we had to do for each week."

With regard to assignments they would "like the opportunity to hand the assignments in any time before the end of the term, because we are all going through various stages of adult and children issues plus studying and working." Additional recommendations included providing more time in class for discussion; class time should not repeat textbook material.

With regard to how the program administered the students suggested that the program become transferable for undergraduate university credit, and that efforts be made to promote the credibility of the program.

> If somebody were to ask me now: 'Would you recommend a certificate course?' I would have to respond that if they were taking it solely for knowledge sake it is great, but if you were taking it because they need to upgrade, don't do it because it is not worth while. Take Public Administration or something else that makes you promotable, or something that can be used in the B.Sc. program, or look at a masters level. I think that you have to be cost effective in your educational choices. This program, I would say for the majority of people, is not cost effective now because it does not advance you the way that some of the others do.

To help remedy this problem the students suggested approaching employers. "I think that the advisory committee has to be a working committee that taps into all the vested interest groups and makes the statement that if you support this you will have benefit from it."

Another suggestion was to change the marketing strategy.

> You have two jobs of marketing. First you have to market the credentialing of it, and second market the program to get more students in the program. I think as a former student I could ask my employer for some time off to go out and talk to 'whoever' about this

> program. Other students might be willing to do that as well, because I think that there is a need out there. But I know that my employer needed to be pushed a little bit to say that we will include that in our prospects when advertising for a job.

Other marketing ideas included information at major conferences, and a newsletter that would also be sent to students and graduates. One graduate said, "it gets back to a marketing issue. I have staff that I try to get off to training all the time, and I have to know what is available." The graduates also felt that "we are your target group and we are not finished learning," and they suggested an update course or seminar on current trends, research, and issues.

Additional Integrated Findings

In addition to the major themes reported by question, other issues emerged from the interview findings. These issues were not specific to any one questions but were global in scope, as so did not relate to only one question.

A theme emerged as the students described the changes in their professional development resulting from participation in the Program. It became clear in their examples that they actively used the changes in their knowledge, skills, and attitudes to influence their peers and coworkers. Examples of this influence included a student who has "been sharing the things learned and attitudes of how to treat seniors with new student nurses and staff." Another student stated that "the whole issue of how do I work with staff in order to help them empower seniors was very profound to me. Not to do *for* but to do *with.*" A student further added, "I now have a unit of coworkers who have learned through my example not to do things for them but to help them be independent and do for themselves." Still another indicated that she was "working at extending education through practitioners and older adults and validate their life experiences and the successes that they have had." As a result of learning about research two students said we "strongly influenced our peers when we had the opportunity to apply for dollars in nursing research." They also indicated that the knowledge they gained influenced in-service presentations, team planning and decision making.

When considering the impact of this influence on the participants' coworkers, it is important to remember that the students were asked only to give examples of how their knowledge, skill, attitudes, and aspirations have changed as a result of participating in this program. The students were not asked how these changes effected their coworkers, but chose to make that connection on their own.

Another interesting note regarding the students' change in attitudes was the use of personal reflection to bring this change about. This reflection was integrated into some of the students' most memorable assignments,

> I have to think that the assignment that Diane gave us where we had to chronicle our interactions with older adults throughout our lives. First of all when I did it and reflected up on my experiences and how when I got to nursing I began to see all old people as infirm and sick and disabled and so forth, I really carried those same views into community practice. That for me was a deep profound learning of the entire course.

The students also felt that they had a mandate to share the information they had gained with others, including hospital administration, policy makers, coworkers, peers, and older adults. The interdisciplinary aspect of the program also broadened their perspective regarding their colleagues, and increased the sharing of information.

Through analyzing the dialogue around the professional development question, it was apparent that as the students talked about the changes in their attitudes, they then moved on to discuss the attitudes of others towards the program and attitudes towards seniors in general. The attitude of ageism was seen to effect societies' view of the Program , and of others in their profession. "I think that the enrollment problem is reflected in societies' ageism, 'exactly you are very right', and it is an extension of that." "I had to really confront my own ageism that I was unaware of... and now I see it in my coworkers." "It is amazing how ingrained it is in our culture, and that is how necessary the program is... and yet if you do not have all the stake holders supporting it is very much at risk." Throughout the interview many students attributed some of the Program's lack of recognition to general ageism that exists in society.

Concluding Remarks

By answering the interview questions, the students clearly indicated some major issues that superseded all the questions. Program transferability, advanced credit, recognition and credibility are of critical importance to the graduates and current students. They also perceive a lack of an effective marketing strategy. In addition, they identified issues concerning the content and delivery of the Program. With regards to the relative amount of theory and practice, they expressed a desire for a balance between the two. Finally, the interdisciplinary nature of the Program was perceived to be its strongest feature.

Chapter V

Conclusions

This final chapter presents a summary of the study, including its purpose, research methodology, and a summary of its findings. The conclusions arising from the findings are provided, and recommendations based on those conclusions are outlined. Finally the possibilities for future research are discussed.

Summary of the Study

This study was drawn out of a larger program evaluation study regarding the Certificate Program in Gerontology at the Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta. This Program has been in operation since the fall of 1989, and was designed to enhance the continuing professional development of individuals working in the field of gerontology. The objectives of the larger program evaluation were to gather information for facilitating effective decision making, to foster teamwork and communication among program stakeholders, and to facilitate the focusing of the goals, objectives, and operations of the program. For further information please refer to Chapter One.

The major purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of program participants. This study was guided by four research questions. The first question sought information on students' expectations of the program. The second question explored how participation in the Certificate Program contributed to their professional development. The third question focused on the students' reactions to the program, and the fourth question explored the students' suggestions for changes to the program.

These research questions and the subsequent interview questions were developed in consultation with two professors from the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta, and the Director of the Applied Sciences programs at the Faculty of Extension. The focus group interview questions were pilot-tested in March, 1993 with two groups of graduate students at the University of Alberta who were participating in a research course in the department of Adult, Career and Technology Education. Each pilot interview group contained seven students, and lasted approximately 40 minutes.

The data were gathered by the use of two focus group interviews, one with current students, and one with graduates. Both interviews took place in a classroom at the Faculty of Extension on a Wednesday evening in April, 1993. The interviews lasted for one and a half hours each, and were conducted by the researcher. These interviews were tape recorded with the written permission of the participants. The researcher was assisted by a Professor from the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. This individual operated the tape recorder, took notes and aided in arranging the room.

All the graduates living in the Edmonton area (11) were invited to attend the focus group; 7 participated. There were 14 active students who by completing a form that had been given to them indicated an interest in participating in an interview. Of those, 8 agreed over the phone to participate, and 5 actually attended.

The computer program Sonar Professional was used to assist in the analysis of the data. Findings were reported as descriptive data using the interview questions as a guide. Then patterns and themes within the data were reported.

Summary of Findings

Findings from this study are presented according to the interview questions, and according to themes that appeared throughout the data. The data from both focus group interviews are grouped together because no significant differences were found between them. The findings are summarized in the following section.

Motivation of students. (from the introductory activity) As a way of creating a positive climate within the group, I asked the participants to describe who they were, what type of work they did, and what motivated them to pursue the program. The motives that students cited for pursuing the program were very broad, and each person had a slightly different reason. For all the participants motivation was a dynamic mix of at least two factors. Generally the motives for pursuing this Program were reported firstly to relate to work issues, and secondly to relate to personal issues. The most frequently sighted motivation for pursing this Program was in conjunction with professional growth.

Question 1: What were your expectations of this Program? The participants were asked to describe what exceptions they had of the program, and if these exceptions were met. Generally the students indicated that their expectations regarding the "caliber of people involved" was exceeded. This included the instructors, guest speakers, and fellow students. The students felt that the program gave them the knowledge that they needed. Most of the electives were perceived as exceeding their expectations.

It does appear that the work load they were expected to do was greater that what they had anticipated. They perceived that the amount of work was equivalent to that of graduate level courses, and all agreed that it was "a lot of work." This perception of work appeared to the students to be the reason why so many of their classmates left the Program. "The amount of the work and the expectations that were involved in the Program had a lot to do with people dropping out."

The participants felt that the recognition for their work was not adequate. For the students, the recognition came in two forms: transferability of courses for university credit, and employer recognition. This lack of recognition appears to represent a significant failure of the program in meeting the expectations of the participants. This theme of recognition is closely tied to the issue of work load, and recurs throughout the focus group interviews.

Question 2: How has this program contributed to your professional development? For the purpose of this question, professional development was defined as the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and aspirations (KASA).

The change in knowledge was the most frequent change indicated by the students. This change in knowledge often lead to new skills, and sometimes to a change in attitude. Although many of the participants' attitudes did not change, they did indicate an affirmation, and validation of their attitudes. As a result of the interdisciplinary approach of the Program, many participants described a broadening of their knowledge, and a widening of their perspective of the field of gerontology. The participants shared many personal examples of how the program had contributed to their professional development.

Question 3: What were your reactions to the program? The students were asked what they liked and disliked about the program. The interdisciplinary focus of the program appeared to be its most valued feature. They appreciated being treated like adult learners, with an encouragement for interaction with fellow students, and instructors. Overall, the students enjoyed the instructors, materials and electives.

The students liked how the program considered their needs, by starting classes at 6:30 p.m. rather that 7:00 p.m. so that they could finish earlier. They also liked courses to finish at the end of November rather than carry on into December. They would like the electives to be offered when core courses were not running, or alternately when the assignments for the core courses were not due.

The most disliked aspect of the Program was the perceived lack of recognition. Many felt that the core courses should be transferable for undergraduate university credit, and that the program should have more recognition within the field of gerontology. This issue of recognition seemed to relate to many of the issues that were discussed during the focus group interviews.

The students also felt that the program had two different levels of learners, professionals, and those with a basic background. The students felt that the instructors could not adequately address the needs of both groups of learners.

The students also disliked the "excessive library work." To save time they would like the instructors to select the readings ahead of time. If this is not possible the students wanted more effective library orientation.

The repetition of material between two or more core courses, and between core courses and electives was also disliked. They were also concerned about misleading course descriptions in the brochure, and too many scheduling changes of course offerings.

In conclusion the things liked and disliked by the students indicate the importance of the consideration of adult education principles when planning a continuing professional education program. All of the logistical factors that were liked and disliked about the Program are in the control of the program administrators and instructors. Things such as when the classes start, how long they run, the timing of electives, the overlap of material, the application of adult learning principles, the accuracy of the course descriptions, the scheduling of course, and the consideration of students' time when using library resources can all be influenced by the administration's use of adult learning principles.

Question 4: What suggestions do you have for changes to the program? In another example of the importance of the consideration of student time, the participants suggested having the course readings related to the assignments. They also indicated the need for an extensive library orientation (at the beginning of the program) so that they could effectively use their time. Flexibility in the timing of assignment due dates would also be appreciated.

The timing of electives could be improved, as well as an increased selection of elective topics. The fostering of classroom discussion and the sharing of information among professionals both formally, and informally should be encouraged.

The students suggested that the core courses become transferable for undergraduate university credit, and that efforts be made to promote the credibility of the program through the efforts of the Advisory Committee.

The promotion of the program related to the recommendation by the students for a new marketing strategy. This new marketing strategy could have two purposes: to promote the credibility of the program to the community, and to promote the program to prospective students.

Additional Integrated Findings. As stated earlier, the issue of the recognition repeated itself throughout the interviews. This also occurred with the issue of the credibility of the program, and the transferability of core courses.

An interesting pattern occurred in the participants' descriptions of their changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes. When participants gave examples of these changes they repeatedly described situations in which they used this new learning to influence their peers and coworkers. They felt that they had a mandate to share the information they had gained.

When the students discussed their changes in attitudes they carried the discussion on to include the attitudes of others toward the program, and towards seniors in general. They felt that the attitude of ageism affected both how the program was perceived, and how seniors were seen.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The summary of the data just discussed brings order to the data, and organizes it into patterns, categories, and basic descriptive units. This section takes the analysis one step further. The conclusions and implications involve attaching meaning and significance to the analysis, explaining descriptive patterns, and looking for relationships and connections among descriptive dimensions (Patton, 1990).

The following conclusions are derived from the findings and are in no special order. Appropriate recommendations follow each conclusion.

1. Overall participants were generally satisfied with the Program. In order to maintain and increase this satisfaction greater attention could be paid to incorporating adult learning principles in to the Program.

The students indicated that their formal learning time was limited, and they wanted to use it as effectively as possible. They indicated a need for the Program to be meaningful and relevant to them, and wanted to be involved in the learning process. The students appreciated being treated with respect and benefited greatly form class discussion and learning from their peers. All of these needs relate to well documented principles of adult education (Apps, 1991; Brookfield, 1990; Brundage, 1980; Draves, 1984; Ferguson, 1989).

Recommendations:

The Program's administrators, Advisory Committee and instructors should be aware of the basic principles of adult education. These principles need to be incorporated into the curriculum, and must be reflected in the way students are treated by the Program administration, and instructors. In-service training could be made available to all instructors, and adult education principles could be outlined in the instructor's handbook.

The administration could be aware of and respond to the students' needs regarding the timing of the courses during the evening, and the completion date of the courses in the fall. They can also effectively control the timing of electives, the descriptions of courses, and the changes in the scheduling.

The curriculum sub-committee, working with the instructors and administration, could eliminate the over lap or repetition between classes, cut down on library time by supplying articles, and relate readings to course assignments. Instructors can design the teaching-learning situation so that group discussion and learning from classmates is maximized. They can design the assignments so that learning is made more relevant to each student.

2. The motivation of the students for pursuing the program was a complex mix of influences generally relating to work and personal issues.

The students most frequently cited motivation for pursuing this Program were related to professional growth. Students also indicated personal reasons, including social activity and the need to continue learning.

Recommendations:

The administration, Advisory Committee, and the instructors need to be aware of students' motivations so that they can balance the objectives of the program accordingly. Because professional growth was expressed most frequently it should be reflected clearly in the programs objectives. The participants' personal motives could be reflected in the design of the curriculum and instructional methods chosen. Consideration of these motives are also critical to an effective marketing plan.

3. The Program lacks recognition within the University credit structure and within the gerontology and related communities.

The students felt that the work that they have done for the core courses is equivalent to that of other university credit courses and should therefore receive transfer credit. They also felt that there was very little recognition of the Program by the public or their coworkers.

Recommendations:

The issues of transferability and recognition of the program are complex, but nevertheless have to be addressed in order to ensure the success of the Program. Within the confines of the university system the issue of transferability must be resolved and a definite direction must be pursued. Until this decision is made and adequately justified, this issue will continue to be important to the students. If it is decided that these core courses will not be transferable, the curriculum of these courses should be significantly different from other university credit courses so that transferability is no longer an issue.

As many curriculum models suggest, the public relations of a program is critical to its success. The public and others in the field of gerontology have to be aware of what the program does, and must be convinced that it is a valuable service to the community.

4. A twofold marketing strategy is needed to promote this program.

It appears that the program is not well known among potential students, employers, and the general public. This is consistent with the lack of recognition expressed by many students (as mentioned above).

Recommendations:

Because the Program is not well known in the community or among potential students, the administration along with the marketing sub-committee should develop a comprehensive marketing plan. It should involve input from instructors, program graduates, current students, Advisory Committee members, and administration, and access as many resources as possible, including local and national gerontology associations, and the resources of the University of Alberta. The purpose of the plan should be to increase the number of participants in the Program, and to improve its credibility, leading to the recruitment and retention of more students.

5. The electives are seen as a valuable part of the program and should be expanded.

Most of the electives were well received by the students, who enjoyed the opportunity to delve deeper into a topic, and to receive information that they could apply directly to their situation. They indicated that the variety of electives could be increased, and made many suggestions for future topics.

Recommendations:

The success of the current electives should be built on by offering a greater variety of current topics. The curriculum sub-committee should consider the students' suggestions for future topics, as well as the suggestions of those on the Advisory Committee, and the instructors. This work should be done in conjunction with the marketing sub-committee in order to facilitate the marketing of theses electives to individuals outside the program.

6. The interdisciplinary aspect of the program was perceived by all as very positive.

The students indicated that they gained a great deal from this interdisciplinary focus, and that it lead to a sharing of information and a broadening of perspective. This interaction with other professionals, and learning from them, was seen as a significant strength of the program.

Recommendations:

The interdisciplinary aspect of the program should be maintained, and the interaction of the students should be encouraged. This aspect of the program should be highlighted when promoting the program to potential students.

7. The Program does contribute to the development of professional in the field of gerontology.

As professional development is the purpose of this program it is critical to note that it is occurring. Changes in knowledge were the most frequently expressed growth in professional development. These changes often lead to new skills and sometimes to a change in attitude. Participants reported that their attitudes were validated and reinforced by their participation in the program.

It appears that participants have frequently used changes in their knowledge, attitudes, and skills to influence their coworkers, and peers. Their professional development has affected decision making, policy formation, in-service training, and education of other professionals.

Recommendations:

The abundance of examples of how this Program has contributed to the professional development of the participants should encourage all those who are associated with the program. This focus on professional development should continued to be incorporated into the planning and administration of this Program.

Future Research

An interesting finding resulted form the participants discussion of their professional development. The students were asked to give examples of how their knowledge, attitudes, skills, and aspirations (KASA) changed as a result of participating in this Program. Although they were not asked to relate their examples to work situations most of the participants did. These examples of changes showed how the participants use new (KASA) to influence their coworkers, peers, and supervisors. Their examples indicated that they used new (KASA) to influence in-service presentations, team planning, decision making, and instruction of student nurses.

Although the impact of CPE on the clients is well known and documented in the literature, it would appear that the use of new (KASA) to influence coworkers, peers, and supervisors is relatively unexplored. Not only would further research in this area contribute to what is known about CPE, but would also add to the understanding of how professionals practice, and could be used by program planners in the developing of learning activities.

In conclusion, evaluation is applied research, and the information that it produces can have immediate use in decision making and policy determination. A deeper understanding of the students' experiences and perceptions of the Gerontology Certificate Program at the Faculty of Extension was obtained. Focus group interviews were an effective data gathering tool because they tapped into human tendencies. Individuals rarely form opinions in isolation, but rather develop them after listening to the opinions of others. (Krueger, 1988)

It is widely agreed that there is a tremendous potential need for a program such as this. It is clear from the data that as a result of this Program significant learning has taken place. Many of the students and graduates are advocates for this kind of continuing professional education, and are possibly the greatest asset of the program in the community.

For this Program to reach its potential it is critical that it encourage and build upon its positive aspects including its: interdisciplinary nature, focus on professional development, development of electives, and use of adult learning principles. Addressing the issues of recognition and marketing are central to the success of this Program. It is hoped that this research will assist the decision-makers in their process, and that it will aid in the focusing of the goals, objectives, and operations of the Program.

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Appendix A

Student Questionnaire

GERONTOLOGY CERTIFICATE PROGRAM FACULTY OF EXTENSION,

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Please use the back of the page if you need more space.

1. What motivated you to pursue this certificate program? Please check the most important motivation.

A. Preparing to enter a specific job or career. _____

B. Changing careers. _____

C. Preparing for further career advancement. _____

D. Increasing personal development/fulfillment. _____

E. Performing my job more effectively. _____

F. Enhancing professional development. _____

G. Fulfilling employer's requirements or expectations. _____

H. Other. ______________________________

2. How has this program affected your work/professional life? Please check the most important effect.

A. It has helped me to work more effectively. _____

B. It has increased my prestige with colleagues. _____

C. It has made more jobs or different types of work accessible to me. ___

D. It has helped in obtaining a raise or increasing my benefits. _____

E. It has helped me to obtain a promotion. _____

F. It has had no affect. ______

F. Other. ____

3. What are the strengths of the program?

4. What are the weaknesses of the program?

5. What changes would you suggest for the program? (Content or Delivery)

6. Are you planning to complete this program? _____ When? __________

7. If you answered no to question six what are your main reasons for not continuing on in the program?

8. We are interested in what continuing professional education you have pursued outside of this program. (courses, workshops, seminars, conferences, conventions and literature)

Please feel free to provide any other comments or suggestions on the back of this sheet. **THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE!**

Appendix B

Covering Letter

THE FACULTY OF EXTENSION

University of Alberta

The Certificate Program in Gerontology

February 10, 1993

Dear Program Participant,

The faculty of extension is appealing to you for help. We are not asking for funds all we ask is a few minutes of your time.

It is to your advantage to be recognized as a participant in a program which has an excellent reputation for the education and training of individuals in the field of gerontology. You can assist us to maintain and improve this reputation by cooperating in the evaluation of the Certificate Program in Gerontology at the Faculty of Extension. What we would like to ask you is to give us your candid, honest opinion of the program. Your opinion is valuable to us even if you have only taken one course or have not participated in the program for some time. The enclosed questionnaire should take no more than fifteen minutes of your time to answer.

Also enclosed you will find an invitation to participate in a group interview. This is an opportunity to come together with others and discuss your experiences and suggestions for the program. These interviews will be scheduled in the second and third weeks of March in the evening. Your time commitment would be approximately an hour and a half. We would be very pleased to have you participate. If you are interested, please fill out the enclosed form and return it with the survey. Leaving your name does not commit you to participate. You will be contacted for final arrangements.

Please note that all answers are strictly confidential and you are free to opt out of any question.

Thank you for your courtesy and for your assistance in helping us to improve the Certificate Program in Gerontology.

Very sincerely yours,

Carla Drader, Research Assistant

Reminder Letter

Certificate Program in Gerontology

March 10, 1993

Dear Participant,

All of us are busier these days than we should be, and most of us have a hard time keeping abreast of those obligations which are essential and required. We know how the little extras sometimes receive or best intentions, but we also know that in reality none of us have the time which we would desire to fulfill those intentions.

From the questionnaire which reached you --we hope-- about three weeks ago, we have had no reply. Perhaps you mislaid the questionnaire, or it may have miscarried in the mail--any one of dozens of contingencies could have happened.

In any event, we are enclosing another copy of the questionnaire. We are sure you will try to find fifteen minutes somewhere in your busy schedule to fill it out an drop it in the mail. We would very much like to have your feedback, as we are evaluating the program and proposing future changes. We understand that you may no longer be participating in the program or that you might not have taken a course for some time. But your opinion is still important to us. We would really like to hear from you.

Thanks. We shall appreciate you kindness.

Very sincerely yours,

Carla Drader, Research Assistant

Appendix C

Focus Group Interview Invitation

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

________ YES I AM INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN AN INTERVIEW.

NAME:

ADDRESS

PHONE NUMBERS

BUSINESS:

RESIDENCE:

Follow-up Letter

April 6, 1993

Dear

Re: Gerontology Certificate Program Focus Group Interview

We are so pleased that you will be participating in our upcoming focus group on Wednesday, April 14 from 7:30 to 9:00 in room 2-20 at the University Extension Center at 112 St. and 83 Ave.

A focus group is an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic. Groups are usually 6-12 people. Participants are asked to reflect and respond to a limited number of questions related to a particular issue. They hear each others' responses, but it is not necessary or expected that there will be consensus. However it is important to explore and probe the underlying reasons and arguments of each position. The purpose is to gather in-depth information of high quality where people can interact.

There are four issues on which we will be concentrating:

- What expectations did you have, and were they met?
- How has this program contributed to your professional development?
- What did you like about the program and what did you not like?
- What suggestions do you have for changes to the program?

I hope that this information will help you prepare for our interview. If you have any questions or concerns please to not hesitate to call me at 436-9536.

Thanks again for your willingness to participate, and I am sure that the information gained will contribute to improvement and development of this program.

Sincerely,

Carla Drader

Research Assistant

Agenda of the Focus Group Interviews

PURPOSE OF THIS INTERVIEW: Is to explore your experiences in the gerontology certificate program.

WHAT IS A FOCUS GROUP: It is an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic. Groups are usually 6-12 people. Participants are asked to reflect and respond to a limited number of questions related to a particular issue. They hear each others' responses, but it is not necessary or expected that there will be consensus. However it is important to explore and probe the underlying reasons and arguments of each position. The purpose is to gather in-depth information of high quality where people can interact.

WHAT WILL BE ADDRESSED AT THIS MEETING:

- Outline of the process and the purpose.
- Introductions.

There are four issues on which we will be concentrating:

- What expectations did you have, and were they met?
- How has this program contributed to your professional development?
- What did you like about the program and what did you not like?
- If you were given the job of improving the program what would you change?

Interview Schedule

Welcome/Thank you

The purpose of this session is to explore your **experiences** in the gerontology certificate program. This is part of the research that is being gathered for the **program evaluation** that is currently under way.

Introduce myself, and Paula

Explain what a focus group is: an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic.

You will be asked to respond to a few questions. (which you received in the mail)

Due to the nature of the interview you will hear each others responses, but it is **not necessary** that you **agree** with each other.

The **purpose** of this interview is to get an **understanding** of every ones point of view, and the experiences that they have had.

We will be here for **an hour and a half**, even if we don't get through all the questions. It is my job to facilitate the discussions so that we can find out as much as we can about your experiences in the program. We will be spending approximately 15 min. on each question.

So sit back and **relax,** and help yourself to **refreshments** at any time, we are going to be very informal here.

With the exception of the introductions **we are not going to go around the group,** and you are not required to participate in each question. You should participate when you feel comfortable.

We ask that everything that is said in this interview tonight be kept confidential.

Your names will not appear in the report.

You can opt out of the interview at any time.

We would like to tape record this sessions so that we don't have to take such detailed notes, as so that we don't miss something important that is being said.

Do you have any questions about the focus group process and why we are here tonight?

At this time I would like to pass out consent forms and then we can begin.

1. (7:45 start) I would like to start this interview by asking you to **introduce** your selves by stating what **you do for work**, and what **motivated** you to take this program.

2. (8:00 start) What were your **expectations** of this program?

courses, assignments, instructors, students, administration, how it would effect you work life. (What did you expect to get from the program?)

3. (8:15 start) How has this program contributed to your **professional development**?

have you learned new **skills**

gained new **knowledge**

changed any of your **attitudes**

lead to any new **aspirations**

4. (8:30 start) What did you **like** about the program, and what did you **dislike** about it?

5. (8:45 start) If you were given the job of improving the program what would you **change**?

- Whoever is comfortable with this question can start.
- So I hear you saying ________________
- Is this similar to how the rest of you are thinking
- Is there any one who disagrees with this or has a different point of view? Would you like to talk about that?
- I see what you mean
- That sounds very interesting but can I ask you about ________________

Consent Form

Student Experience in The Certificate Program in Gerontology

This study has been explained to me and I have had an opportunity to ask questions. I understand the project and voluntarily have the right to opt out of this study at any time.

Signature of Participant Date